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OBSERVATIONS

ON

POETRY.

RESERVATIONS

ON

LOTTERY

OBSERVATIONS

ON

POETRY,

Especially the EPIC.

Occasioned by

THE LATE POEM

UPON

LEONIDAS.

K Pemberton (H)

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ADVERTISEMENT.

UPON reading many years ago the works of Homer I formed to myself an idea of poetry, which I afterwards found to disagree in several particulars, with what had been delivered by the most eminent critics. As in conversation with my friends occasions offered from time to time to give my opinion on this subject, I was often solicited to publish my thoughts: but employments of a quite different nature always prevented me from ever thinking of writing upon a point so liable to disputes. It was the poem on Leonidas, that put me upon recollecting my former conceptions on this head, which I have here sent abroad with a disposition ready to receive in-

VI ADVERTISEMENT.

formation of any mistakes, I may have committed in a matter of speculation, on which the sentiments of the learned have been at all times so much divided.

Gresham-College,
9 May, 1738.

H. PEMBERTON.

CONTENTS.

CONTENTS.

INTRODUCTION.

The occasion of this treatise.

The method.

p. 1

ibid.

ibid.

SECTION I. Of the nature and primary intention of epic and dramatic poetry. p. 4

Epic and dramatic poetry described.

ibid.

The preheminance ascribed by Aristotle to the fable.

p. 5

His reasons considered.

p. 7

Milton's opinion of the fable.

p. 9

The most valuable intention, for which epic and dramatic poetry are fitted.

ibid.

SECTION II. Of the use and dignity of epic and dramatic poetry. p. 11

Instructive in the knowledge of men.

ibid.

Conducive to virtue.

p. 12

Bossu's opinion concerning the means, whereby these poems were intended to instruct.

p. 13

LeClerc's objections to this doctrine approved.

p. 16

But the weakness of his inference from thence shewn.

p. 17

Epic poetry less extensively useful upon Bossu's principles.

p. 18

When epic poems may be considered, as having some one principal intention, and when not.

p. 19

The true foundation of Homer's exalted character through all ages.

ibid.

A 4

Plato's

Plato's objections against epic and dramatic poetry considered. p. 20

The use of poetry distinguished from the abuse of it. p. 21

An answer to the objection drawn from the abuse of it. p. 25

SECTION III. *Of the fable of epic and dramatic poems.* p. 26

UPON what principles the true excellence of the fable is to be estimated. ibid.

The fable to consist of one compleat action. p. 27

What is to be understood by the beginning, and what by the end of an action. p. 28

This illustrated from the Iliad, the Odyssey, and the Æneid. ibid.

Of the order of narration in an epic poem. p. 31

The lines of Horace thought to respect this considered. p. 33

Vida's opinion considered. ibid.

What lays a poem under the censure of being historical. p. 34

When the natural order ought to be disturbed, and when not. p. 37

Of the compass of time to be taken up in a dramatic representation, or epic narration. ibid.

Why a whole life, or a long war an unfit subject for an epic poem. p. 39

These observations applied to the poem on Leonidas. ibid.

That the fable is single and intire. ibid.

Resembles

CONTENTS.

ix

<i>Resembles the plan of the Iliad.</i>	p. 40
<i>Why both in the Iliad and this poem the narration is not inverted.</i>	ibid.
<i>That the subject of an epic poem be important.</i>	p. 41
<i>When it ought to be taken from the history of the poet's country, and when that is not necessary.</i>	p. 42
<i>Why the poem on Leonidas is not built upon a point of English history.</i>	p. 43
<i>This poem's being formed on a piece of history not fabulous considered.</i>	p. 44

SECTION IV. Of sentiment and character.

	p. 45
<i>SENTIMENT and character defined, and distinguished into general and particular.</i>	ibid.
<i>Invention described, in order to shew the eminent degree of that faculty, and the real knowledge required in the poet for justly exhibiting character.</i>	p. 47
<i>THE characters in the poem on Leonidas.</i>	p. 50
<i>The character of Xerxes.</i>	ibid.
<i>The character of Hyperanthes.</i>	p. 51
<i>The character of Teribazus.</i>	p. 52
<i>The character of Ariana.</i>	p. 53
<i>Concerning subjects of compassion, and what is commonly called poetic justice.</i>	ibid.
<i>The character of Polydorus.</i>	p. 54
<i>The character of Demaratus.</i>	p. 55
<i>The character of Alpheus and Dienece.</i>	p. 59
<i>The character of Megistias, with the behaviour of Menalippus at their parting.</i>	ibid.
<i>The character of Agis.</i>	p. 60
<i>The</i>	

CONTENTS.

<i>The character of Diomedon.</i>	p. 60
<i>The character of Demophilus.</i>	ibid.
<i>The character of Dithyrambus.</i>	p. 63
<i>The character of Leonidas.</i>	p. 65

SECTION V. *Of the language of poetry.*

<i>WHEREIN the beauty of poetic language consists in general.</i>	p. 70 ibid.
<i>The general nature and design of poetry inquired into in order to specify more particularly the characteristic of poetic diction.</i>	p. 71
<i>Aristotle's definition of poetry defective.</i>	ibid.
<i>The characteristic of poetry according to Hermogenes and Eratosthenes, with Strabo's defence of the art against this representation of it.</i>	ibid.
<i>The nature of poetry according to Fracastorius.</i>	p. 73
<i>Wherein the essence of poetry truly consists.</i>	p. 74
<i>Proved by examples from the three greatest poets, Homer, Virgil, and Milton.</i>	p. 77
<i>The use of epithets in poetry.</i>	p. 83
<i>THE general uses of a figurative style.</i>	p. 85
<i>Tropes and figures defined.</i>	p. 88
<i>Concerning the composition of words and other variations of them from their common form.</i>	p. 89
<i>Of the metaphor.</i>	p. 90
<i>Of the hyperbole.</i>	p. 93
<i>Virgil's use of the hyperbole.</i>	p. 95
<i>Lucan's abuse of it.</i>	p. 97
<i>The styles suited to the different kinds of poetry.</i>	p. 98
<i>to comedy.</i>	ibid.

CONTENTS

to tragedy.	p. 99
to descriptive poetry.	ibid.
to epic poetry.	p. 100
Caution in the use of a figurative style.	p. 101
THE style of our author.	p. 102

SECTION VI. Of versification. p. 106

THE difference in general between the measures of the ancient odes, and of the verse for recital; and by what means the ode-measures are reducible to a musical movement.	ibid.
OF the measures of the verse suited to recital.	p. 111
Of arsis and thesis.	p. 113
Of cæsure.	p. 115
Of the relation between the verse and the members of the sentence.	p. 118
Of the licences in iambics.	p. 119
Of the variation of the numbers.	p. 120
St. Austin's characteristic of verse.	ibid.
Concerning the length of verse; and why our epic verse is not extended beyond five feet.	p. 123
OF English versification, and the quantities of our syllables being directed by the accent.	p. 125
When the accent came to govern the verse in the Latin and Greek languages.	p. 127
The measure of our long narrative verse.	p. 130
The rule of the Italian and French narrative verse.	ibid.
The variations allowable in our narrative verse.	ibid.
The verse of our author.	p. 134

SECTION

SECTION VII. *Of the difference between epic and dramatic poetry.* p. 136

THAT epic poetry can exhibit more compleat characters than tragedy. *ibid.*

Epic poetry not confined to a single place like tragedy.

p. 137

That epic poetry admits more ornamental language.

Here of similes. *ibid.* p. 139

An epic poem may be adorned by descriptions and reflections. *ibid.* p. 144

Ornamental descriptions in the poem on Leonidas.

ibid.

Ornamental reflections in the same. p. 146

SECTION VIII. *Of the sublime.* p. 151

OF taste in general, and what temper of mind disposes to relish the sublime. *ibid.*

What constitutes the sublime. p. 153

Of the sublime of language. *ibid.*

Of sublime subjects. p. 154

Of sublime subjects of description. *ibid.*

Of the ancient machinery. p. 155

The ancient theology not now to be used but in the way of simile. p. 161

Examples of such similes from our author.

p. 162

Examples of sublime descriptions. p. 164

Of sublimity of sentiment, and of our author's success therein. p. 166

CONCLUSION. p. 167

ERRATA.

P Ag. 3. l. 3. after Aristotle del. the comma. p. 6.
 l. 12. r. preferred. p. 16. l. 22, 23. r. mischief.
 p. 42. l. 10. r. disposed to move the passions of the spec-
 tators. p. 44. in the notes l. 4. r. ἔδδ'εῖν. p. 49. in the
 notes l. 1. r. ἐνθουσιασμοῦ. ibid. l. 7. r. Πῶς αὖν. p. 69.
 l. penult. r. poetic. p. 110. in the notes l. 5. after
 διαίτη del. the comma. p. 156. in the notes l. 4. r. πα-
 ραδιδόντες.

ERRAT.

Pag. 79. l. 4. r. queritur. p. 156. in the notes l. 1. 2.
l. 2, 3.

OBSERVATIONS

ON

POETRY.

INTRODUCTION.

IN relation to every work, which has obtained the esteem of the public, it is no unreasonable suspicion, that some may be directed in their applause by general fame; nor is it less probable, that there should be others, who are induced to acquiesce in ill-grounded objections from an excess of caution against such influence, or from an implicit submission to the authority of some one, for whose learning or judgment they may have contracted too great a veneration. I here therefore propose to inquire, by what means we may determine without prejudice of any kind the proportion of merit, which the late poem on the celebrated action of Leonidas at the straits of Thermopylæ may justly claim.

WERE the precepts of critics always consistent with one another, and with truth, nothing more would be necessary towards deciding upon any poetic performance, than to compare it with their dictates. But as the most approved are on some points divided, and, where they are more unanimous, not
B always

OBSERVATIONS

always in my apprehension free from error; I intend to examine into the genuine principles, whereby our opinion on works of this kind ought to be regulated, independent on any authority whatever.

For this purpose I shall first inquire into the primary and most useful design of epic poetry, and its great importance towards the improvement of human nature: I shall then treat of the subject matter, and the manner wherein it ought to be handled. But the epic being the most eminent and extensive of all poetry, a perfect judgment is not to be formed on all the parts of this without a good degree of knowledge in the other branches of the art also. For this reason I shall join dramatic poetry with the epic in my reflections, on what is common to both; and in relation to the language of poetry, as far as the brevity, I have here prescribed myself, will permit, I shall consider the specific characteristic of the diction appropriated to each of the principal species. I shall be somewhat large on the measures of verse, this subject, as it relates to our language, having been almost entirely neglected. In the last place, after some notice of what is more peculiar to epic poetry, I shall conclude with a short examination, wherein truly consists that sublime, in which this kind of writing is expected to excel all others.

In the prosecution of my design I shall not only compare the writings of critics with one another, but also with the most eminent poets, especially Homer, the original of all criticism upon epic poetry,

try, and acknowledged the most excellent by the universal suffrage of antiquity: for according to Aristotle, Homer, and he alone, never had failed in judgment in his art*; and though Quintilian certainly wishes, that some greater equality in his countryman Virgil might compensate for his inferiority in other respects†; yet he is forced to assign the Latin poet only the second rank, though he places him nearer the first, than any other poet to him‖: the giving him preference on account of avoiding some small negligencies is of modern date, the effect of narrowness of mind, of a genius confined within the circle of such trifles, and unqualified to discern the just preheminance due to the supreme excellencies.

* "Ομηρος δὲ ἄλλα τε πολλὰ ἄξιον ἐπαινεῖσθαι, καὶ δὲ καὶ ὅτι μόνον τῶν ποιητῶν ἐκ ἀγνοεῖ, ὃ δεῖ ποιεῖν αὐτῷ. Poet. c. 24.

† *Quantum eminentioribus vincimur, fortasse equalitate pensamus.* Instit. Orat. l. 10. c. 1.

‖ *Secundus est Virgilius, propior tamen primo, quam tertio.* Ibid.

SECTION I.

Of the nature and primary intention of
epic and dramatic poetry.

AS poetry has at all times been employed to sing the exploits of great and worthy men; upon this was formed the scheme of that species called the epic, wherein is framed on the names of past heroes, and some action, in which they had been engaged, a fabulous narration embellished with those numerous and extended circumstances, which left it impossible to be considered, as in any measure intended for a true history of such a fact; being indeed a moral composition to represent the good and ill effects of different characters and passions. Afterwards, in those musical and poetic entertainments, which in Greece were exhibited at public festivals, they introduced in pursuance of this example a direct imitation of feigned actions, either of a public or private nature. And the first of these were most usually, like the epic narrations, grounded on some historical relation; but in the latter the whole foundation of the action was generally feigned. This latter, called comedy, was originally confined to subjects of ridicule and humour in imitation of a narrative poem of Homer in the same kind *, but at length was employed in genteeler representations of private life. And tho' the

* Margites, now lost.

the earliest compositions of the other kind, called tragedy, were formed on some past transaction of great and known personages; yet afterwards, as we learn from Aristotle *, and see by many modern examples, it extended itself to other serious and important actions totally fictitious.

IN affigning the primary intention of epic and dramatic poetry to be the representation of the different characters of men, and the effects of their several passions; I shall possibly be thought not to have paid a due regard to the decrees of Aristotle, who expressly says of tragedy, (intending the same to be understood of epic poetry also †) that of all the parts, of which it consists, the fable is the most important ||; that tragedy is not an imitation of men, but of actions, of life, of good, and of bad fortune ‡; that the action is not framed for the setting forth of characters, but that characters are assumed for

B 3

for

* Οὐ μὲν ἀλλὰ καὶ ἐν ταῖς τραγωδίαις, ἐνίοις μὲν ἐν ἡ δυνάμει γινώσκων ἐστὶν ὀνομάτων, τὰ δὲ ἄλλα πεποιημένα, ἐν ἐνίοις δὲ ἐθέειν, οἷον ἐν τῷ Ἀγάδων⊖ Ἀνδρεί. Ὀμοίως γὰρ ἐν τούτῳ τὰ τε πρῶτα γράμματα, καὶ τὰ ἐνύματα πεποιήται. Poet. c. 9.

† ὅστις περὶ τραγωδίας οἶδε σπουδαίας καὶ φανύλης, οἶδε καὶ περὶ ἑπῶν. Ibid. c. 5.

|| Μίμησον δὲ τέτων ἐστὶν ἢ τῶν πραγμάτων σύστασις (i. e. μῦθος—λέγω γὰρ μῦθον τέτου τὴν σύνθεσιν τῶν πραγμάτων.) Ibid. c. 6.

‡ Ἡ γὰρ τραγωδία μίμησις ἐστὶν ἐκ ἀνθρώπων, ἀλλὰ πράξεων, καὶ βίου, καὶ εὐδαιμονίας, καὶ κακοδαιμονίας. Ibid.

for the sake of the action *. His reasons are, that character being a quality cannot be the end of tragedy, for the end must be an action; and the end is in every thing of chief importance †: That tragedy may be destitute of character, though it cannot be without action ‖: nay, he would persuade us, that the fable is more difficult to execute with success, than the representation of characters, because the first poets have been generally more deficient in this, than in the other ‡. Upon which foundation he is very large in discussing, what kind of fable is to be preserved, whether the simple, or the implex, and by what circumstances the latter should be involved, considering all these points independently of the characters of the personages engaged in the action.

AFTER

* Οὐκ ὁπῶς τὰ ἥθη μιμήσονται [*sc. ποιῶσι*] πράττειν· ἀλλὰ τὰ ἥθη συμπεριλαμβάνουσιν διὰ τὰς πράξεις. Ibid. Victorius in his comment on this passage understands by it, that men do not act in life to shew their characters; but join some character to their actions. Though the word μιμήσονται, imitate, must refer to the poet, and thus Castelvetro, and other interpreters render the place.

† τὸ τέλος πράξις τίς ἐστίν, ἡ ποιότης. Εἰς δὲ κατὰ μὲν τὰ ἥθη ποιοί πνευ—”Ὡς τὰ πράγματα καὶ ὁ μῦθος τέλος τῆ τραγωδίας. Τὸ δὲ τέλος μέγιστον πάντων ἐστίν. Ibid.

‖ Ἄνευ μὲν γὰρ πράξεως ἢ ἀν γένοιτο τραγωδία, ἄνευ δὲ ἥθων γένοιτ’ ἂν. Ibid.

‡ οἱ ἐγχειρῶντες ποιεῖν πρότερον δύνανται τῇ λέξει καὶ τοῖς ἥθεσιν ἀκρίβειν, ἢ τὰ πράγματα συνίστασθαι, οἷον καὶ οἱ πρῶτοι ποιοῦνται σχεδὸν ἅπαντες. Ibid.

AFTER so positive a decision of this presumed oracle in criticism to advance the contrary may appear very surprizing to those, who are still enslaved by the pedantry of submitting implicitly to ancient authority, under which all literature and science for many ages lay oppressed. But from this bondage the world, to the great improvement of arts and knowledge, is at length in a good measure freed. Since therefore Aristotle has been pleased to give us reasons for this his decision, we may be allowed to examine into the validity of them.

When he asserts the preheminance of the fable from its being the end of tragedy, he has certainly not distinguished between the end pursued by the actors in the poem, which is the accomplishment of the affair, whereto they are parties, and the primary intention of the poet; whose end in writing may, notwithstanding this argument, be to exhibit by means of the action the characters and suitable conduct of the personages, he employs in it.

When Aristotle argues from the necessity of a fable to the very being of tragedy, that the wisest and best expressed moral sentiments set down without reference to some action will not be a poem of that species, but that the orderly representation of an action, though deficient in sentiment and character, will still deserve that name*; this is no

B 4

proof

* εἰάν τις ἐφεξῆς θῇ ῥήσεις ἠδικὰς, καὶ λέξεις, καὶ διανοίας εὖ πεποιημένας, ἢ ποιήσῃ, ὃ ἢ τῆς τραγῳδίας ἔργον.

proof, that the plan of the fable is of the greatest importance towards the excellence of tragedy, or that it demands the principal attention of the composer: for though tragedy and epic poetry must necessarily be built upon some action, yet the excellence of every such poem may notwithstanding consist in the just representation of such sentiments and passions, as the action will naturally excite in the personages engaged according to their respective characters.

The example, he mentions from the earliest writers, is no proof of the superiour difficulty in forming the fable, because their deficiency therein might arise from neglect. And that this was the real case is evident; since later poets, whom we know to be equally desirous of succeeding in fable and character, have excelled earlier writers in the first, whom they have not been able to equal in the second. Of which perhaps no fuller example can be given, than from our countryman Shakespear, who with the greatest imperfections and even absurdities in the plans of his fable, has executed his characters in a manner scarce to be rivalled.

Moreover, though this great critic asserts, that it is by the circumstances of the fable, by surprizing turns of fortune, and unexpected discoveries, that our minds are chiefly touch'd *; yet, I think, it must be

ἔργον, ἀλλὰ πολὺ μᾶλλον ἢ κατὰ δεικτέον τούτοις κε-
 χρημένη τραγωδία, ἔχουσα δὲ μῦθον καὶ σύνταξιν
 τραγῳδικῶν. Ibid.
 * τὰ μέγιστα οἷς ψυχαγωγῇ ἡ τραγωδία, τῷ μύθῳ
 μέρη εἰσὶν, αἵ τε πειπέταιαι καὶ ἀναγνωρίσεις. Ibid.

be allowed, that the most artificial contrivances of this sort, where the personages do not think and act suitably to these circumstances, are no better than childish amusements.

MILTON, one of the greatest of poets, and who was not ignorant of what Aristotle had writ, places the fable in a much more subordinate degree, when in the preface to his Sampson Agonistes he speaks of it transiently thus; that what is commonly called the plot, whether intricate or explicit, is nothing indeed but such oeconomy or disposition of the fable, as may stand best with verisimilitude and decorum.

EVEN Aristotle himself, when he goes to distinguish between the office of the historian and poet, puts the merit of the poet upon his expressing character; That poetry is more philosophical, and even of a more serious and important nature than history; because, while history confines itself, to what is done or suffered by particular persons, poetry shews, what speeches and actions do probably, or of necessity agree to the characters of men *. Homer had this so much in view, that from one short occurrence

* φιλοσοφώτερον καὶ σπουδαιότερον ποίησις ἰσοείας ἐστίν. Ἡ μὲν γὰρ ποίησις μᾶλλον τὰ καθόλου, ἢ δ' ἰσοεία τὰ κατ' ἕκαστον λέγει. Ἐστὶ δὲ καθόλου μὲν τῷ ποίῳ τὰ ποί' αἴτια συμβαίνει λέγειν, ἢ πρέπειν κατὰ τὸ εἶδος, ἢ τὸ ἀναγκαῖον, ὃ σοχάζεται ἡ ποίησις ὀνόματα ἐπιτηδεύειν. Poet. c. 9.

occurrence only at the siege of Troy he has taken occasion to paint distinctly the characters of all the principal persons concerned both in the conduct of the siege, and in the defence of the city. To relate the events, which have passed in the world, is the subject of history; to feign strange and marvellous achievements with no farther design than to engage a reader's attention on the single principle of curiosity, should be confined to romance and novel; the poet ought to make it his chief endeavour to open the human mind, and bring forth the secret springs of action, the various passions and sentiments of men, upon which depends their good or ill conduct in every condition of life. It is for this end, Horace sends the poet to the writings of the philosophers*. And however a well-contrived fable may for once by its novelty amuse us agreeably; where the sentiments, the manners, and characters of men are displayed, we must receive a much more lasting pleasure; here we shall always find fresh entertainment, be furnished with new reflections every time we read, and our minds be improved more and more in proportion, as we are delighted.

* *Scribendi recte sapere est et principium et fons.* De arte Poet. v. 309. And

Rem tibi Socraticæ poterunt ostendere chartæ. Ibid. v. 310.

SECTION

SECTION II.

Of the use and dignity of epic and dramatic poetry.

IHAVE been thus particular upon Aristotle's doctrine in relation to the fable or plot, not because it was any way necessary towards my primary design of examining the poem on Leonidas (for I do not perceive the plan of that poem at all to clash with this critic's precepts,) but because I apprehend, the preheminance, he gives to the fable, is derogatory from the real dignity of these kinds of poetry; which certainly merit that high esteem, they have always obtained, from their instructing us in the passions and characters of men.

THE forming a right judgment upon the temper and behaviour of those, with whom we have intercourse, is the principal branch, of what is called knowledge of the world, and is a very essential part of prudence. This skill is acquired by men of business from long experience. But these kinds of writings, by shewing the natural effects of different tempers and passions under feigned actions, contribute greatly to the same purpose. In this view they may very justly be compared with the experimental part of natural philosophy. For as in that science artificial experiments are contrived, wherein the powers of nature may discover themselves

selves by acting under less disguise, than in the ordinary course of things; so in such feigned actions and characters, as the poet frames, the inmost recesses of the soul may be laid open, and thereby the passions be shewn with more distinctness, than they are seen in history, or in the common affairs of life, where the sentiments and emotions of passion, which pass within the minds of men upon each occurrence, can be discerned only in proportion to the ability of the observer for making just deductions from the external appearances, that come under his cognizance. By this means that eminent tyrant, Alexander of Pheræa *, who had passed his life in an uninterrupted series of the greatest cruelties without remorse, was melted into tears at a tragic representation, where the effects of the calamity on the mind of the sufferer were expressly set forth before his imagination.

THIS example points out a still greater use of these writings, no less than the advancement of virtue.

The powers of the human mind may in general be ranged under two heads, the understanding, and the temper. By the first we acquire the knowledge of things, and distinguish one from another; by the latter we are sensible of some kind of pleasure or dislike from almost every object, that presents

* Plutarch. in Pelopid. et in Orat. 2. de fortun. vel virtut. Alexandr. magn.

presents itself before us. From hence we are not only struck with the perception of beauty and deformity from sensible objects, but also from the subjects of our thoughts and reflection. Thus, of human actions, in which we have no personal concern, some command our esteem and admiration, others create disgust and abhorrence. Herein the best of the ancient moralists placed the foundation of goodness and virtue. This faculty, or disposition of the mind is strengthened and confirmed by frequent exercise; for which these poetic performances not only furnish occasions, but when such emotions of soul are excited by these writings or representations, they are usually indulged, and permitted to operate at full liberty without controul from more private or selfish passions, by which generous sentiments in affairs, where we are interested parties, are often too soon stifled. This effect of these compositions is so general and certain, that the philosophers appeal to it for proof, that such a principle of virtue is common to all men, and indubitably implanted in our nature *. But under this cultivation will these seeds of virtuous inclinations successfully grow up, and be brought to maturity.

Moreover, for the completion of virtue not only a disposition to goodness is required, but also the knowledge of what is praise-worthy. And herein these writings will equally assist; for while such feigned

* Cicer. de Finib. l. 5. c. 22.

feigned examples of good and evil conduct in men are the subjects of our consideration, we shall insensibly learn to form just and impartial opinions of human actions and passions. This has made Horace say, that virtue and prudence are taught by Homer more fully, and to greater advantage, than in the writings of the most eminent philosophers*.

Bossu is so much misled by the preference, Aristotle gives the fable, that he confines his enquiry into the nature of epic poetry to the consideration of the fable only †, which Aristotle plainly makes a part of these poems distinct from the representation of character ‡; and he supposes this moral instruction to be so included in the action, as to presume, that both Homer and Virgil proposed by their poems purely to inculcate some general moral sentiment, which they had first conceived in their thoughts; and that their poems were plan'd out with the single design of

* —*quid sit pulchrum, quid turpe, quid utile, quid non, Plenius ac melius Chrysippo et Crantore dicit.*

Epist. 1. 1. ep. 2.

† *Aristote dit, que la fable est ce qu'il y a de principal dans le poëme, et qu'elle en est comme l'ame (Ἀρχὴ, καὶ οἶον ψυχὴ ὁ μῦθος) Nous devons donc chercher la nature de l'épopée dans la nature de la fable. Traité du poëme epique, l. 1. ch. 6.*

‡ *πάσης τετραγώνιας μέρη εἶναι εἶξ, καθ' ἃ ποιὰ πρὸς τὴν ἢ τετραγώνια· ταῦτα δ' εἰσὶν, μῦθος, καὶ ἡθὴ, καὶ λέξεις, καὶ διάνοια, καὶ ὄψις, καὶ μελοποιία.— Ἀρχὴ μῦθος, καὶ οἶον ψυχὴ ὁ μῦθος τῆς τετραγώνιας, δεύτερον δὲ τὰ ἡθὴ. Poët. c. 6.*

of exhibiting some fictitious transaction, which in the way of example might illustrate, and fix in the mind of the reader such preconceived maxim; the action or fable of these poems bearing an exact analogy to those short occurrences feigned by Æsop between brutes suitable to the general qualities, we ordinarily ascribe to them *. He goes so far as to suppose these latter fables capable of being extended into a great length, like the fables of the epic poets. For instance, that the fable, where a wolf is represented as getting an opportunity to prey upon a flock of sheep, while the dogs, who should guard it, fall out with one another, might, like the Iliad, be expanded by a representation of the cause of the quarrel between the dogs, with all the other circumstances attending it, by beautiful descriptions of the pastures, where the sheep fed, and of a neighbouring wood harbouring the wolf, by giving the wolf a train of young ones, and by describing the carnage in different assaults, by the genealogy of the heroes of the story, the wolf to boast his descent from Lycaon, and a chief among the dogs from him, who gave name to the celestial sign †. By these, and other like sallies of imagination this author fancies, the same design may be accomplished, as Homer has executed in his Iliad; not perceiving, that the elegance of the Æsopic fables consists in their brevity, and a ready application to their intended moral. Such a lengthened tale, as this

* Ibid. ch. 7, &c.

† Ibid. ch. 9.

this author has laid out, can never be considered in any other light, than as designed for burlesque, and as a trial by ridicule of the epic poem, it should resemble, or at least as a mere entertainment of mirth. To read such a piece with the same seriousness, as an epic poem, is so wholly impossible, that, I think, nothing could more effectually demonstrate the wide difference between these two kinds of fable than this very illustration, he has made use of to shew their near resemblance.

But to consider this notion in the most favourable view, as we have no means of knowing the express intention of Homer or Virgil, but from their works; the only reason to imagine, they formed their poems on some one moral maxim, must be, that no other of equal importance is to be found in them. But *Monf. le Clerc* * has very well observed, that the evils, with which an alliance may be attended from discord, and from any of the parties breaking measures with their chief, are not more fully represented by the calamities following the dissension between Agamemnon and Achilles; than the mischiefs that may accrue from the strictest union, when grounded on too implicit a submission to a single authority, is exemplified in the ruin, which comes upon the Trojans and their allies by their hasty compliance with the rash resolves of *Hector*, and the neglect of the advice given by *Polydamas* upon the reconciliation between the Grecian chiefs.

Nay

* In his *Parrhasiana*, part 1. pag. 59, 60.

Nay, that we may equally learn from this poem, that too great power may be destructive to a monarch, as well as to the people whom he governs. If Priam and his family could have been controuled in their resolution to retain Helen, neither the city of Troy, nor himself had fallen a sacrifice to the just resentment of Greece.

The same author has canvassed in like manner the particular morals, Bossu assigns as the foundation of the *Odyssley* and *Æneid*.

But though we cannot fix upon one single moral lesson, as the sole intention of those poems, it ought not from thence to be concluded, their authors had no design at all farther than to compose an amusing story. If we consider the immense variety of useful observations, which may be drawn from a diligent examination of every part of the conduct of the several persons represented in the *Iliad* only, it is not to be conceived, how the writer by mere accident, and without any express design could possibly lay together so copious a fund for the most instructive moral reflections. The distinction, which ought here to be made, is between allowing in these poems no other intention than to exemplify some general maxim relating to men's conduct, and the more extensive design of exhibiting some finished picture of life, wherein may be exposed to view not only the natural consequences of human actions, but the tempers and the passions of men, with the internal motives both to good actions, and to those deviations from the general principles of virtue,

tue, which we daily see and lament in the world.

In supposing Homer to have composed his *Iliad* with a regard to the state of his country in his own time, and his *Odyssey* to give an important article of advice to princes, we ascribe to the poets a high point of ambition in taking upon them to be instructors in form to kings and states; yet upon a more perfect inspection into the nature of these writings we shall find this scheme to come very short of their real merit and dignity. For this makes them subservient only to particular purposes; whereas these poems, when they justly and fully represent the characters of men, are suited to instruct both public and private persons in all countreys, and in all ages. But it is by the representation of characters, that this is effected. For the actions of men are so various, that the fable of a poem, which shall bear an analogy to a transaction, which has past at one time, may not soon meet again with its parallel; but the natural tempers and dispositions of the human mind are always the same, and by the behaviour of men in one action in consequence of their respective characters their conduct may be judged of in other actions also, though of a different kind. The use therefore of this species of poetry being so universal, though occasions may offer, wherein the poet shall be directed in the choice of his subject by some present circumstance of his country, yet it is not necessary that he should always have in view any such particular point of instruction, before he chuses a fable. But any occurrence of his story,

story, suited to furnish a number of characters worthy to be expatiated upon, is a sufficient inducement for a poet to write; and the greater variety there is of such characters, and the more worthy any of them shall be of the attention of the public, the greater will be the excellence of his work.

When one person is more distinguished than the rest in the action of any poem, or some general design is pursued throughout, what relates to that person or design will be most conspicuous in the work. Virgil's poem turns almost wholly upon the person of Æneas; the *Odyssey* stands chiefly related to Ulysses and his family; in the poem on Leonidas both the principal character, and the rest of the Grecian chiefs are distinguished by great love to their country, and eminent valour in its defence. The *Iliad* contains so full an account, of what passed amongst the Trojans both in their city, and in the field, as well as of the transactions in the Grecian camp, that it is not easy to determine, what part of the action the writer chiefly intended to embellish.

But should we even suppose, that the poet's first motive to compose that work was, what Bossu contends for, to recommend union among the several states of his country; yet certainly this by no means includes the whole extent of his undertaking. He has not only built his poem on a difference between two princes; but has drawn distinctly the characters of each, and shewn, how the haughtiness of one, and the impatient temper of the other in-

flamed a debate in council into a quarrel almost irreconcilable. Now as the like disagreement might have arose between persons of other characters, all the attention, he has given to mark out the particular turn of mind in each of the contending parties at the time of the dispute, and in their whole behaviour afterwards, is no way necessary towards shewing the bad effects of discord. Nay more, he has equally employed in his poem a great variety of actors, who contribute nothing to the quarrel, whose characters are wrought up and finished with as much care, as theirs, between whom the contention arose. By this finished representation of life and manners the poetry of Homer, without being considered as subservient to any particular purpose, has been the admiration of all ages, and stands at the head of a kind of writing perhaps the most instructive, and therefore of the greatest importance to mankind, of any production of human wit.

BUT here a charge brought by Plato against the poets must be considered, who accuses them of chusing subjects more suited to entertain than instruct*: in particular, that the tragic representations of persons grieving under adverse fortune tend to corrupt our minds; for that by indulging the impressions, such representations make upon us, we are in danger of weakening our own tempers, and rendring our selves less able to support the evil accidents

* De Republ. l. 10.

accidents of life. But this is confounding firmness of mind with hardness of heart. Compassion for the calamities, to which human nature by the vicissitude of fortune is continually exposed, arises from a temper of mind by no means inconsistent with fortitude; it being constantly seen, that those, who have the strongest compassion for the distresses of others, have supported their own with great magnanimity; and none are less apt to be moved at others ills, than such, as are the most subject to repine and sink under their own disappointments. Aristotle has much more justly observed, that this kind of poetry is conducive to refine the passions, it excites in us. Certainly such representations will give us occasion to distinguish the true objects of each passion.

It must indeed be confessed, that however useful these kinds of poetry built on the actions and passions of men may be towards directing us in the conduct of life, and forming the mind to virtue; yet they are capable of being perverted from this their high office.

The genuine design of comedy is to represent the true source of private enjoyment from family affections, and the judicious choice of our acquaintance and friends; to shew the inconveniences arising from imprudent conduct, and the irregular sallies of passion, together with the ridicule due to capriciousness of temper, and other particularities of humourists: tragedy on the other hand is adapted

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to form the mind to compassion, to give just apprehensions of the uncertain state of human felicity, to set forth the excellence of fortitude, public benevolence, and the other great virtues, and to inspire a detestation of the contrary vices. But each of these may be perverted to serve evil purposes.

Comedy is thus abused, when it is employed to give favourable representations of vicious pursuits after pleasure, or treats with the levity of ridicule great immoralities; this is to allure men to the approbation of some vices, and to look on others without detestation; to persuade the corrupt, that they may purchase at the risk of a few jests only, the gratification of their inordinate desires, which they might possibly think too dearly bought at the expence of the general indignation and abhorrence of mankind.

The effects of tragic representations are equally mischievous, when instead of the calamities, to which mankind is subject from the uncertain condition of human affairs, they present before us no other distresses, than what arise from the impetuosity of selfish desires. Though such weaknesses are not unnatural to particular ages and constitutions, and within proper bounds are just objects of compassion; yet constant representations of this kind can only serve to continue that infirm temper beyond those tender years, wherein only it is pardonable, and prevent that steadiness of mind, which ought to take place in a more advanced age, and that moderation towards personal indulgencies, which

which is required to the just performance of the necessary duties of life. Accordingly we have seen that effeminate nation, to whom we chiefly owe this corrupt taste, long to have received the just reward of their infamous endeavours to extirpate all manliness from the human breast by becoming the prey of every invader, and passing from hand to hand with as little resistance as the cattle, which graze on their lands.

Epic poetry may also be no less misapplied. Though I shall by no means subscribe to the fancy of those, who attribute to Virgil the impious design of assisting the establishment of universal slavery, and of flattering the founder by drawing such a character in his Æneas, as the poet imagined, the tyrant would be pleased with having applied to himself, and might delude his countrymen into a base acquiescence under their new bondage.

Whereas tragic and epic poetry relate chiefly to men in high station, and comedy or similar narrations regard the busy part of common life, as it is found in cities and large societies; so the true office of pastoral is to express the cares and the amusements of the rustic condition *. But instead of this a spurious kind has sprung up †, wherein, however the thoughts may be confined to cattle and pastures, or other rural objects, we are plainly

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presented

* *Admirabilis in suo genere Theocritus, sed musa illa rustica et pastoralis—urbem reformidat.* Quint. Institut. Orator. l. 10. c. 1.

† See M. de Fontenelle sur la nature de l'églogue.

presented with persons of superiour fortune acting in masquerade, and abandoning themselves to a languid indolence inconsistent with the state, they pretend to imitate, and exceedingly immoral in persons of high condition, of whom it is required, that their exemption from labour, the lot of other men, be repaid with some attention to the general welfare of that public, by whose indulgencethey enjoy their ample fortunes, and honourable titles. In short, these pieces, and their kindred-novels exhibit as false a picture of human affairs, as the knight-errantry and enchantments of romances; but are so much the less innocent follies, as it is easier for men to give themselves up to languor of mind, or the unbounded sway of personal desires, than to propose to share in the glory of the imaginary heroes of those legends.

Most certainly all poetry is capable of the like abuse. Songs and the other lesser species of verse may be employed in instigating the passions towards unlawful pleasures. And satyre, whose office it is to cast the just contempt upon follies, and to draw the sword of a severer indignation against more serious enormities, loses its end, when it is turned into general invective; for then under the disguise of censure it in reality unites its forces with the most abandoned, whose constant endeavours are to represent the generality of men as corrupt as themselves, who very well know, that to treat mankind, as universally vicious, is to throw the greatest discouragement in the way of virtue by rendering

dring suspected the most unexceptionable conduct, and to give the most effectual support to the cause of vice, since the social nature of man will ever make it certain, that in the worst of crimes

Defendet numerus, junctæque umbone phalanges.

However, though poetry may be rendered subservient to vice, yet certainly Plato is too severe in condemning all representations of great and heroic characters, that are not in every particular worthy of imitation * : for it is the business of the professed philosopher to specify expressly, what is laudable, and what not ; the only offence in poetry is to give false or partial views of human actions and passions, and to abound with indulgent representations of fashionable or captivating vices. But it is a full reply to all objections against the art drawn from any abuse of it, that they equally affect every kind of writing whatever, wherein the interests of mankind are in any measure concerned. Even among those prose authors, who enter themselves in the list of moralists, are to be found the most pernicious of all writers, such as by advancing erroneous principles, and misrepresenting human nature make a direct attack upon the understandings of men, and without shame openly labour to engage in favour of vice that faculty, which is given us for the supreme judge and ruler of our desires.

* De Republ. l. 3.

SECTION III.

Of the fable of epic and dramatic poems.

IF now it appears, that the true merit of epic and dramatic poetry consists in exhibiting the characters of men, and the genuine effects of the several passions; we have a certain criterion whereby to judge of the plan or fable of such poems. Aristotle for want of this principle was unable to give any reason at all for some of his precepts, and was obliged to take up with very insufficient ones for others. But upon this foundation it is evident, that the chief excellence in the plot of any dramatic or epic piece consists in such a disposition of circumstances, whereby each character and passion may most fully, and most distinctly be set forth. What superiority of invention is necessary for this, above what is required towards contriving any chain of events, where within the limits of probability the facts shall follow by means so unexpected, as may excite upon the first reading or representation the most agreeable surprize, or other emotion of passion, will be very evident upon considering with the least attention the conduct of the *Iliad*, how wonderfully the multiplicity of incidents in that poem are adapted to illustrate the characters of the several agents, how those characters are brought out, as it were, in turn, and distinct parts of the poem expressly appropriated to exhibit even separate particulars in each, insomuch that almost the

the last lines of the poem contribute to the finishing of a principal character. Had the *Iliad* ended with the death of Hector, as the *Æneid* does with the victory over Turnus, we should have lost one ingredient in the character of Achilles, a frankness and generosity no way inconsistent with the impetuosity of his temper, though scarce possible to appear, while he was under the power of his resentment: we could not have known his reconciliation with Agamemnon to have been sincere without the compliment, he pays to the dignity of his high station in the book of games; nor have been apprized, what humanity he was capable of towards an enemy in distress, but by the interview with Priam in the last book.

A JUDICIOUS and well-imagined fable is so necessary towards setting forth the characters after the most effectual manner, that it constitutes a very great, though not the principal part of the poet's merit. And we shall now proceed to consider, what conduct herein will best answer this intention.

IN the first place, the fable ought to contain such a continued series of events dependent on each other, as may compose one well united course of action; for as the tempers and characters of men are made manifest in action; so to support and carry on the passions of the agents to their full height, the whole of the transaction, wherein they are engaged, should be continued without intermission; for whenever
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the action ceases, the thoughts and sentiments occasioned by it must necessarily be interrupted.

Again, this series of events should be exhibited from the beginning, that the subject may be the better understood, and should be prosecuted to the end, that the passions of the agents may be carried through their whole period.

This is all, which can be understood from Aristotle's precept, that the fable should consist of one intire action *. But to determine distinctly what may properly be called the beginning, and what the end of any action, we must consider, that though all the affairs of a man's life are in some sort connected with one another ; yet as he is not employed at all times with the same degree of assiduity, so there continually come in his way fresh occurrences, that determine him to some particular pursuit, and excite a new set of thoughts and passions, during the continuance of which the man considers himself as engaged in a distinct action beginning from the incident, which first engaged him in such pursuit, and ending as soon as that particular affair ceases to engross his thoughts. What is here said of one man, relates equally to any numbers or bodies of men. Moreover a series of events, which in this view will compose one intire action, may be a part only of some other.

Among the occurrences of the world the siege of Troy by the united force of Greece under the conduct

* Poët. c. 7.

conduct of Agamemnon may be considered as one action. Homer has represented this siege as carried on for a great while rather by blockade, than in any other form, till the dissension between Agamemnon and Achilles, weakening the Greeks, and encouraging the Trojans to come forth, and encounter them in the open field, gave a new turn to the war, and brought on a series of events, which beginning with that quarrel continued without intermission, till a reconciliation was accomplished between the Grecian chiefs, the Trojans repulsed within their walls, and the war reduced again to its former state. On this incident only the poet has formed his *Iliad*, the unity in the action of which poem consists in its containing an uninterrupted series of events dependent on one another. The poet's proposing the anger of Achilles, as his subject, is not what gives the required unity to his design. For since anger is a passion, the action must be the exerting his anger against some person or other. And the poem begins with the anger, he conceives against Agamemnon upon the account there at large related. But this anger ceases with their reconciliation, which is made immediately after the death of Patroclus. It is true, Achilles is then again in wrath, but against a quite different object: And this change of the object of his anger makes a total alteration in his conduct. His anger against Agamemnon causes him to retire from the war, but his rage against Hector brings him out against the common enemy with the greatest
I fury.

fury. Thus the action of the Iliad is not single in regard to the person of Achilles; but from the whole series of the incidents being so judiciously connected, as in the most conspicuous manner to bring on one another.

The action is also entire, or includes the whole subject, beginning with the first ground of the quarrel between Agamemnon and Achilles, and continuing on to a cessation of arms between the Greeks and the people of Troy, which restores each party to their former situation, and finally closes the whole course of the action, to which the dissension between the Grecian chiefs gave rise.

The action of the Odyssey is single and entire with regard to Ulysses in person. The action of this poem is commonly understood to comprehend the whole series of the wanderings, which Ulysses underwent after his departure from Troy: for though the poem opens with the disengaging that hero from the nymph Calypso, by whom he had been full seven years detained; yet the story is so contrived, as gives Ulysses himself an opportunity of relating with some distinctness the former part of his adventures. Hence the Greek proverb ὅτι τὸν Ὀδυσσεὺς ὁμηοειδῆς *. But as his return home was obstructed for so long a time by Calypso, who had no design of parting with him, and without whose permission he could not go; and since her consent at last to his departure was not in consequence

* The last first, after Homer's manner.

quence of any endeavours of Ulysses himself, but by the command of Jupiter at the instigation of Minerva; we may without any impropriety suppose with Minturnus and Castelvetro * a distinct action to begin from this event. For though the whole series of adventures befalling Ulysses after his setting out from Troy till his arrival and settlement in his dominions may be considered, as included under one action; yet the part of those adventures succeeding the event, wherewith the poet begins his narration, composes alone as compleat an action, as that incident in the siege of Troy, which concerned the dissension between Agamemnon and Achilles.

MINTURNUS and Castelvetro † contend, that the beginning of the fable ought always to be counted from the commencement of the narration. But the action of the *Æneid* cannot, perhaps, be considered, as intire, without comprehending in it all the adventures of *Æneas* from his expulsion out of Troy by the sacking of that city to his settlement in Latium; for in the poem he is first found upon the sea soon after his departure from a port of Sicily, where he had only touched in the course of his voyage.

From this conduct of Virgil I should conclude, that though the whole action is to be represented; yet

* Minturn. de poëta, l. 2. p. 131. Castelv. Aristot. Poetic. part. principal. 3. particell. 4.

† In the places above cited.

yet it is not always necessary for the poem to open with the beginning of it.

Even a dramatic piece may judiciously open at some distance from the first commencement of the action. The Ajax of Sophocles represents the effects of that hero's rage on his being disappointed of the arms of Achilles, which rises to such a deprivation of reason, that he sallies forth in the night, destroys a flock of sheep, which in that fit of distraction he mistakes for the Greeks, by whom he thought himself injured, and at last puts an end to his own life from excess of shame, as soon as he recovers his understanding, and perceives his error. Now since the representation of a madman making havock among a parcel of sheep must have upon the stage an offensive appearance; the poet finds means of conveying the knowledge of this beginning of the action by narration only, and brings Ajax in sight not till the morning, when his disorder of mind still continuing, he comes out of his tent from insulting over two rams, whom he mistakes for Agamemnon and Ulysses.

But though we admit, that Virgil enters upon his narration abruptly in the midst of the action; yet since Homer, in his Iliad at least, has taken the contrary method, it is a very hasty precept, which some have advanced, that such an abrupt introduction of the story is indispensably required, and that the order of time in the action represented ought never to be observed in a poetic narration of it.

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Horace is indeed supposed even by * Castelvetro to favour this maxim. But when he says

Ordinis hæc virtus erit, et Venus (aut ego fallor)

Ut jam nunc dicat, jam nunc debentia dici

Pleraque differat, et præsens in tempus omittat,

Art. poet. v. 42.

these words mean only, that it is best sometimes to follow the obvious order of the subject, and sometimes not. And when he remarks of Homer, that

Nec gemino bellum Trojanum orditur ab ovo;

Semper ad eventum festinat, et in medias res,

Non secus ac notas, auditorem rapit, et, quæ

Desperat tractata nitefcere posse, relinquit, ib. v. 147.

this is saying no more, than that Homer did not intumber himself with the whole war of Troy, but took only such a part of it, as he thought most capable of embellishment †.

Hieronymus Vida, an excellent poet, and one of the earliest among the modern critics, to support this rule misrepresents the Iliad, as designed to exhibit the whole Trojan war, though there is not the

* In the place above cited.

† Minturnus considers both these passages, and denies, that they enjoin this inverted order of narration, concluding thus, *Si quando poema scripturus es, totam quandam actionem eamque unam atque perfectam, quæ principium, et medium, finemque habeat, ad effingendum tibi propones. Ut fabulæ illæ eadem sint partes, quæ sunt actionis, atque eodem ordine collocentur. Præceptum vero illud, ut vel a novissimis, vel a mediis sit ordiendum, haud omnino, verum existimes, velim. Loc. supr. citat.*

the least account, how that war ended, any farther than in general terms, that the city would at last be taken; nor is there more reason for its comprehending

*Aulide jurantes Danaos, vectasque per æquor
Mille rates, raptusque Helenes, et conjugis iras,
Quæque novem Troja est annos perpessa priores* *.

For none of these particulars, except the armament, are spoke of otherwise, than very transiently and imperfectly, when some slight allusion to any of them came necessarily in the way.

Rapin †, and other preceding critics have reproached all poems composed according to the order of time in the narration, as being histories more than poems. But this is no principle, whereon to place the difference. For as the Iliad of Homer, if not the Odyssey also, is related in the exact order of time from the beginning to the end; so the history of Herodotus is more inverted, than any poem has ever been ||. What truly subjects a poem to this censure, is its exhibiting chiefly such parts of the action, as history might properly relate; that is, the

* Vidæ Poëtic. l. 2. v. 84, &c.

† Reflex. sur la poétique en particul. §. 9.

|| Castelvetro in the place above cited thus replies to Pelletier, who advanced this opinion, *Non possiamo credere, che sia differenza tra l'ordine di narrare historicamente, et l'ordine di narrare poeticamente; perciocchè se la poesia, come cosa rappresentante, come è stato detto, riguarda nell' historia, come in cosa rappresentata, per qual ragione dee essere differente da lei nell' ordine? certo non si mostrerà cio per niuna.*

the transactions themselves, and publick speeches. But the secret thoughts, and private interviews upon the several incidents, which occur, are no part of history to take notice of. The soliloquy of Leonidas, when retired from the Spartan council, the interview with his queen, and the private conversation, with which the first book of this poem closes, would be absurd in an history.

The poem of Lucan lies generally under the imputation of being too historical. But it deserves this censure neither from the order of the narration, nor from Bossu's reason, that it is not built upon a moral * ; for it certainly shews the evils of civil discord as much, as the Iliad itself. The only real support of this charge is its containing few instances (though there are some) where the actors speak, unless in council, at the head of troops, or the like public occasions; and the speeches, instead of being accommodated to the particular characters of the speakers, are too much taken from general topics, agreeably to what Quintilian says of him, that he resembles more an orator than a poet †.

Our epic poet, Milton, has paid no regard to this rule ; for he opens his poem with the first imperfect rudiments of the design formed by the infernal spirits against the new creation, of which they had only heard some uncertain reports; and his narration proceeds on in the

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direct

* *Traité du poëme épique*, l. 1. ch. 15.

† *Magis oratoribus, quam poetis adnumerandus*. Institut. Orat. lib. 10. c. 1.

direct order of the action; till the attempt is perfected. What the angel Raphael relates to Adam of the war in heaven, and the creation of the visible world, are two actions absolutely distinct from the subject of the poem.

It certainly must be left to the discretion of the poet not only in regard to the beginning of the story, but also in the following conduct of it, what parts to set directly before the readers view by describing them in his own person, and what shall be delivered from the mouths of any of the personages in the poem: for though Bossu * has justly observed in general, that such relations at second hand come under the same censure, as Horace passes, upon what is supposed to be transacted off the stage, and is only recounted in dramatic poetry †; yet some particulars may most fitly be thus introduced, either from being less considerable in themselves, or that the narration of them may become some character, as well as for other reasons.

In dramatic poetry as the parties of the fable cannot on many occasions, but be separately employed at the same time, one of these actions only can be shewn to the spectators, and the rest, if convenient for them to know, must of necessity be thus related. This gives room for the poet to shew great art in so disposing his plot, that the spectators may

never

* *Traité du Poëme epique*, l. 3. c. 11.

† *Segnius irritant animos demissa per aurem,
Quam, quæ sunt oculis subjecta fidelibus, et quæ
Ipse sibi tradit spectator.*

never be deprived of the sight of any principal parts of the action.

In respect to epic poetry, Bossu remarks, that on account of the forementioned imperfection attending all second-hand relations an abrupt entrance upon the story in the midst of action is only useful, where the action is very long.

HERE therefore an inquiry offers itself, what space of time may properly be included between the opening of the poem, and the final conclusion. This in a dramatic piece is necessarily confined within the compass of a few hours. For as those pieces are seldom above three hours in representing, and the spectators have the action in sight during the whole time; this time ought not to be laid of greater duration, than what the imagination of the spectators can naturally figure out. Certainly an action thus continually in view without any intermission, except the short intervals taken between the acts of the play, cannot well be conceived to extend beyond a single day. Some have supposed that dramatic action to be the most perfect, which should be comprehended within the real time of the representation*; but the plot of such a one must be exceeding simple not to appear unnaturally contracted: and this is necessary above all to be endeavoured, that the fable be a just

D 3

image

* La Poétique de Mesnardiere, ch. 5. pag. 48.

La Pratique du Theatre par Aubignac, l. 2. ch. 7.
p. 156.

image of life, and such a series of events, as may be probable according to the genuine course of human affairs; therefore all plots whatever are to be condemned, which involve such a perplexity of circumstances, as cannot with probability be imagined to fall out in the time supposed by the fable *.

No certain limitation can be set to the time comprehended within the narration of an epic poem: Virgil has taken in about the compass of a whole year; but Homer in each of his poems about fifty days only. In general the time ought to be of a moderate length, that the action may be described

* Mr. Perrault in his parallel between the ancient and modern learning, having stated the difference between comedy and tragedy to consist in this, that comedy confines itself to what is probable, but tragedy intermixes the marvellous with the probable; is so ridiculous as to accuse the ancients of having left the stage imperfect by not contriving a third species of dramatic performances, which might be founded purely upon the marvellous without any regard to probability, which defect is in his opinion happily supplied by the modern Opera. (*Le vray-semblable, et le merveilleux sont comme les deux pivots de cette poésie. La comédie roule toute sur le vray-semblable, et n'admet point le merveilleux, et la tragédie est mêlée de merveilleux et de vray-semblable; ne falloit-il pas, que comme il y a une poésie dramatique, qui est toute renfermée dans le vray-semblable, il y en eût une autre, qui par opposition fust toute composée de merveilleux, comme le sont les opéra, pendant que la tragédie, qui tient comme le milieu entre ces deux extrémités, seroit mêlée de merveilleux et de vray-semblable? Parallele des anciens et des modernes, tome second, p. 191.*)

cribed as much in detail, as possible, with all the circumstances accompanying each incident; for by the means of such circumstances the characters are most distinctly shewn forth, insomuch that as Virgil has employed in his poem a much greater length of time than Homer, so he is less circumstantial, and not a little inferiour in relation to character.

Hence appears why an intire life, or the whole of a long war is a very unfit subject for an epic poem; since thus circumstantially related it must run out into an unmeasurable length, and when once the characters are fully shewn, will become flat and tiresome. If the narration be contracted to a recounting the general events only, the principal design of representing men's characters, and the good and bad effects of their tempers must be imperfectly executed. This I think a better reason, why Homer chose not the whole Trojan war for the subject of the Iliad, than that, with which Aristotle has put us off, that though he had reduced his narration to a moderate length, it must have been perplexed by the great variety of the subject matter *.

THE action of the poem on Leonidas is single both in relation to Leonidas himself, the principal character of the poem, and in regard to the whole

D 4

body

* Διὸ ἤδη καὶ ταύτην θεωροῦσιν ἀνθρώποις Ὀμηρος παρὰ τὰς ἄλλας, τῷ μὴ δὲ τὸ πᾶν ἐμὸν καὶ περὶ ἔχοντα ἀρχὴν καὶ τέλος, ἐπιχειρῆσαι ποιεῖν ὅλον· λίαν γὰρ αὖν μέγας, καὶ οὐκ εὐσύννοπος ἐμελλεν εἶναι ἢ τῷ μεγέθει μετριάζοντα καὶ ἀπεπλεγμένον τῇ ποιικιλίᾳ. Poet. c. 23.

body of Greece, on which the king of Persia made war; and includes in it but a moderate length of time, containing that part of the war, and that only, wherein by the direction of the general council of the Grecian states an attempt was made under the command of Leonidas to stop the enemy at the straits of Thermopylæ. Every incident in the whole poem stands related to this design. The action is likewise compleat; for it begins at the very first motion made to oppose the entrance of the Persians, and terminates with the total frustration of that undertaking by the defeat and death of the Greeks.

The plan of this poem resembles the Iliad in simplicity, proceeding on with an equal tenor without any sudden or surprizing changes of fortune. It also observes the same conduct in the narration, opening at the beginning of the action. Besides the small extent of the action, there is a farther reason for this disposition in each of the poems. The incidents, with which they both commence, shew a distinguished part of principal characters; and therefore, that these might appear in their full strength, those incidents were necessary to be related by the poet himself. The quarrel between Agamemnon and Achilles could not have been seen in so strong a light, if recounted by any of the persons in the poem, as when delivered by the poet: for it must have been unnatural for a reporter to have mentioned more than the subject matter, of what was said by each; nay however circumstantially related,

related, the narration ought to have taken a tincture from the character of the speaker. In like manner it was impossible, that the behaviour of Leonidas in the Spartan council could appear in any degree with so much lustre from the mouth of an inferior character, as now, when the poet has set the action directly before the reader's own view.

ONE thing more is necessary to perfect the plan either of an epic or dramatic piece; that the subject be of such moment, as may reasonably be supposed to interest strongly the parties engaged; for otherwise the poet can neither shew their passions in any strong point of light, nor gain the desired attention from his audience, or his readers. In comedy, especially of the genteeler kind, the basis of the fable is usually a marriage; which is the most interesting subject in the joyous part of life. In tragedy and epic poetry, which are built upon the serious part of life, the plan of the fable can scarce be important enough without involving circumstances productive of great dangers and distress. Aristotle makes very particular inquiry, what incidents in the turns of fortune, or accidental recognitions between the parties will be most subservient to the success of any poem. But I think every thing of this sort may be left to the invention and judgment of the poet in each particular work. Certainly, as unexpected and surprizing occurrences of every kind do naturally operate in an extraordinary manner even on the minds of those,
who

who are only witnesses to the fact, as well as on those, who are personally affected; no reason can be given, why the poet should not take advantage of such a plan to make his representation interesting, provided he use due care to preserve probability: for in proportion as plots of this kind receive their turns from accidents, though possible, yet uncommon and unlikely to come to pass, they are less praise-worthy. But as a happy choice of circumstances disposed to move the passions has gained applause to performances beyond their merit on any other account; so the less assistance the poet receives from such contrivances, his success will be an argument of the greater ability, in what is his chief excellence.

Some have conceived it incumbent on an epic poet for engaging more effectually the attention of his reader to make advantage of the fondness common in men toward their own particular nation, tribe, or sect; and to celebrate some heroic action, in which his country has been accustomed to glory. Homer and Virgil are both supposed to have had this in view. But if by this is meant, that the poet should accommodate himself to flatter some popular vanity, Homer has been very unfortunate in the plan of his Iliad; for out of the whole Trojan war he has selected the incident, which was the least honourable for his countrymen, wherein it appeared, that so extensive a combination of the Grecian force became inferiour to their enemies by the withdrawing of one single state. Nay the
hero,

hero *, on whom he has employed a whole poem, was one of the least potentates in Greece, and eminent only by his personal virtues. Whatever additional delight the *Æneid* might give the school-boys of Rome from so childish a motive as its singing the exploits of an ancient hero, to whom they might claim some relation; yet nothing but the meanest superstition could make any man among the Romans, when that poem was writ, fancy himself, or his country concerned in what might have been done or suffered by one so far removed into fabulous antiquity.

If Homer designed to form his poem on a story generally known, it was necessary for him to take his materials from some one or other of the Grecian states, that people in his time having little acquaintance with foreign affairs. And if any poet writes with a view towards the particular religion or policy of his country, he must chuse a subject relating to themselves. But where the poet's design is of a more general nature, there is no reason, why he should confine himself to any one age or place.

THUS the author of Leonidas, for a poem founded on military prowess and public spirit has chosen the most shining example of those two virtues united in one person and action, that the whole extent of history can furnish. An action in itself so eminent, and of such service to the general interest of Greece, that though the Spartans are justly
to

* Ulysses.

* to be accused of great selfishness and partiality to their own particular state in their ordinary conduct, to which the poet has allusion in the general approbation, with which the speech of Leotichides is received; yet this action was universally celebrated with the warmest encomiums; and has through all ages obtained the admiration of the whole world.

THIS poem is built upon a more known historical fact than the poems either of Virgil or Homer. But Aristotle has determined the truth of a fact to be no objection against its being a just foundation for a poem. For though he distinguishes the office of the historian and poet by the historian's being limited to the relation of real facts, but the poet confined only to the representation of what might happen, and that his story contain a series of consequences either probable or necessary*; yet any real fact, as it partakes of these conditions, may be a fit subject for a poet†. But to be more express, our poet's invention sufficiently appears in the constitution of his plan; for though the basis of the story is taken from history, yet the incidents are feigned, and very successfully for illustrating the characters, as will appear by considering the great number,

* τέτρω διαφέρει, τῷ δὲ μὴν (ἰσοεικὸν) τὰ γενόμενα λέγειν, δὲ (ποιητὴν) οἷα αὖ γένοιτο. Poët. c. 9.

† Καὶ ἄρα συμβῆναι γενόμενα ποιῆσαι, ἢ εἰν ἢ πῶς ποιητὴς ἐστὶ. τῷ γὰρ γενομένῳ ἐνεία ἢ εἰς καλῶς τοιαῦτα εἶναι, οἷα αὖ ἐκός γενέσθαι, καὶ δὲ αὐτὰ γενέσθαι, καθ' ὃ ἐκείνῳ αὐτῶν ποιητὴς ἐστὶ. Ibid.

number, which are distinctly drawn within the compass of so short a work.

SECTION IV.

Of sentiment and character.

CHARACTER, and sentiment whereon character depends, may be thus described. By sentiment in the most extensive acceptation may be understood such thoughts and opinions, whether expressed by words or actions, as men would naturally have upon the incidents, that befall them. These are two-fold, general and particular. Says Castelvetro, when Dido forsaken by Æneas breaks out, *nusquam tuta fides*, she expresses a general sentiment, but had the complaint been uttered against him only, the sentiment would have been particular*. Again character is also either general or particular. By general characters or manners I mean the different cast of mind owing to difference of country, of age, sex, birth, and fortune. Character in particular denotes sentiment and general manners diversified according to the different temper and passions of each individual. This is the part of poetry, in which the divine invention is most eminently distinguished. To this general manners and sentiment are only the outline. Here the preeminence of Homer above all other epic poets is the most conspicuous.

Julius

* Poet. Arist. part. princip. 3. particell. 3.

Julius Scaliger in the third book of his poeticks expatiates much upon the examples of general manners and sentiment exhibited by his idol Virgil. But in this intimate knowledge of the human mind, and this discernment, how the general passions operate in each particular temper, Homer stands unrivalled. Where this faculty is wanting, however the poet aims at varying his characters, they all take a tincture from himself*.

To

* St. Evremont tells us, he once made an essay at writing tragedy, but he found he could not avoid expressing continually his own sentiments and passions instead of such, as were suitable to the persons, he intended to represent; and is so weak as to ascribe this to the secret influence of self-love. (*J'ai eu dessein autrefois de faire une tragedie, et ce qui me faisait le plus de peine, c'etoit de me defendre d'un sentiment secret d'amour propre, qui nous laisse renoncer difficilement à nos qualités pour prendre celles des autres, &c.* St. Evremont sur les Characters de Tragedies.) It is not, perhaps, easy to determine, whether this excuse, or the attempt it self shew greater vanity in one, who had so absurd a taste in poetry, as to say of it in general, that it required a particular genius not very consistent with good sense; that it was sometimes the language of the gods, sometimes of lunatics, but rarely that of an intelligent man; that it delighted in fictions and figures always foreign to the reality of things, which alone could give satisfaction to a sound understanding. (*La poésie demande un genie particulier, qui ne s'accommode pas trop avec le bon-sens. Tantôt c'est le langage des dieux, tantôt c'est le langage de foux, rarement celui d'une honnête homme. Elle se plaît dans les fictions, dans les figures, toujours hors de la réalité des choses; et c'est cette réalité qui peut suffire à faire un entendement bien sain. De la poésie au Marquis de Crequi.*) Oeuv. Tom. iii. pag. 97, 1188.

To form a due conception of the high merit of this faculty, it is necessary to understand, wherein poetic invention truly consists. This distinguished ability, called invention, to which all, who have excelled in every art or science, owe their fame, may be thus in general defined : A power of calling into the mind and assembling what images and conceptions may be subservient to the purpose, which shall be in view. For instance, that military commander shews the most copious invention, who upon every incident is able to assemble in his thoughts the greatest variety of different forms of action, which his present situation admits of, whereby he may be enabled to select the most advantageous; a mathematician employed upon any new problem in that science exercises his invention in recollecting such elementary propositions, and in remarking such consequences from the conditions of the problem, as may be conducive towards the solution of it; and an orator's invention consists in finding out such topics, and such arguments drawn from each, as will contribute to the end, he aims at. It is upon this idea, that the art of invention is made one of the heads among the precepts of rhetoric; and consists in enumerating the common places, which are to be revolved over in the search after arguments, or other means of persuasion upon any subject. Thus this faculty of invention requires both a store of knowledge in the subject, upon which it is exercised, and a power of bringing

bringing forth that knowledge, as each occasion requires.

This faculty differs herein from memory, that memory alone recalls into the mind the images of things in the same manner, as they were first perceived; but this faculty divides such complex ideas into those, whereof they are composed; which it recompounds again after different fashions; thereby creating variety of new objects and conceptions. All men in general possess some share of this power, which, when exercised upon ordinary occasions, is usually called contrivance. But in the degree denoted by the name of invention it is a very uncommon talent; even so much, that those, who are eminently distinguished hereby in one particular subject, shall not discover any extraordinary superiority of that kind in others. Nay in the same subject the greatest man has not this faculty equally at command at all times. This I suppose has given ground to that common fiction among the poets of assuming the character of being inspired by some divinity. However Plato can scarce be supposed to be serious, when he makes Socrates in dialogue with Ion the rhapsodist attribute the success of one Tynnichus, a sorry poet, to a real inspiration from Apollo, because after several worthless performances he had had the good fortune to compose an hymn to that god universally applauded*. Yet in the apology, which Plato has put into the mouth of Socrates,

* In dialog. Ion.

crates, when his life was concerned, he has made him speak almost to the same purpose *.

He is certainly in earnest, when he would argue, that this power of invention is no proof of the most useful knowledge in the subject †. A painter, says he, who can imitate a bridle with his pencil, may neither have the skill of the loriner to make one, nor the judgment of the horseman to know the advantages, which accrue from the best form of it. But if such painter draws not his picture by an immediate view of the original object, in performing of which no invention is exercised; it is impossible, he should represent the most perfect fashion of that instrument without truly knowing that most approved form. Much less can it be imagined, that a poet unskilled in the knowledge of men should be able to make a natural description of various characters, and assign to each their proper parts. Strabo has not only spoke more honourably, but certainly much more justly of poets, when he goes so high in their praise, as to presume, that an excellent poet must necessarily be both a wise and good man ‖. Indeed it is not to be conceived, how any writer

can

* ὅτι ἔσθ' ἡ ποιητικὴ ἀλλὰ φύσει πνί, καὶ ἐνθουσιάζοντες, ὥσπερ οἱ θεομάντεις καὶ οἱ χρησμοδοί. καὶ γὰρ οὗτοι λέγουσι μὲν πολλὰ καὶ καλὰ, ἵπασι δ' ἐξ ἐν ὧ, λέγουσι. τοῖς τὸν πῖ μοι ἐγράψασι παῖσι καὶ οἱ ποιηταὶ πεπονθότες. In Apolog. Socrat.

† Republ. l. 10.

‖ Πῶς μὲν οὖν ἀπερὶ τῶν βίης, καὶ ἀφρον, and immediately after οὐχ' οἶόν τε ἀγαθὸν μένδε ποιητὴν, μὴ ἀπὸ τῶν γνηθέντων ἀνδρῶν ἀγαθόν. Geogr. l. 1.

can escape error in his opinions concerning men and their actions, unless he is furnished with exact observations upon them, and moreover endued with that just ballance of temper, which shall exempt him from any biafs, that may pervert his judgment.

TO examine what share our author may deserve of this high encomium, let us take a short view of his principal characters.

XERXES is an example of a little mind inflated with absolute power. He is not only proud, impatient of contradiction, and precipitate, the natural effects of the adoration and blind submission, which had always been paid him; but we see in him likewise many personal weaknesses. He is possessed of so mean a vanity, as to conclude his great and extensive dominion a proof of his being so singular a favourite of heaven, that no bounds could be set to his good fortune: he had persuaded himself, that the Greeks must have the same abject veneration for him, as his own slaves; and will scarce believe, that his ambassadors had made a true report, who bring him an answer contrary to what his foolish pride had imagined; and it is with extreme difficulty, that his brothers dissuade him from proceeding against them upon that supposition: nay at last he gives orders for attacking the Greeks with the air of being still confident, they must submit to his will without resistance. We soon after
find

find this haughty and insolent monarch indued with a temper so weak and fickle, that upon a little ill success all his vain presumption and confidence abandon him, and he condescends to the proposing conditions, which, before, his pride could not have suffered him to think of without the utmost indignation.

Both the selfishness natural to so weak a mind, and this abject depression of spirits upon the first personal misfortune are well represented in these lines.

———— That morn had rumour told
The loss of half his navy dash'd on rocks
By angry blasts, or buried in the surge.
Thus, when his bleeding sister met his eyes,
Already sunk in sadness, he had lost
His kingly pride, the parent of disdain,
And cold indifference for other's woes;
Nor ev'n beside his sister's nobler corse
Her humble lover now his scorn awak'd.
In tears the captive's mournful tale he heard,
And then first knew compassion; but e'er long
Those traces vanish'd from the tyrant's breast,
His former gloom redoubles, for himself
His anxious bosom heaves, and now he fears,
Lest he with all his numbers should be cast
A prey to fortune. B. 7. v. 5.

In his brother Hyperanthes we see a good character, but confined to the virtues, which can have place under arbitrary government. He is valiant,

so far unprejudiced, as to be duely sensible of the superior virtue in his enemies ; but had no reluctance to commit any kind of injustice towards them, when his brother had pitched upon them for a conquest. Otherwise he has great good-nature, and a just esteem for real merit. This appears in his behaviour towards Demaratus, the Spartan exile, and much more in his singular affection for his friend Teribasus.

TERIBASUS possesses a very worthy mind improved by the study of philosophy, but oppress'd by the violence of a soft passion; a weakness, which the luxury, and the indulgence for pleasure in an Asiatic court must have greatly increased. But Teribasus behaves not under this passion like the whining lovers of romance, who excite our contempt; but in so manly and reasonable a manner, that makes him an object of just compassion, and still worthy the esteem of every one, that has any feeling for human weakness.

But unreveal'd and silent was his pain :
 Nor yet in solitary shades he roam'd,
 Nor shun'd resort ; but o'er his sorrows cast
 A sickly dawn of gladness, and in smiles
 Conceal'd his anguish ; B. 5. v. 50.
 though still

—the secret flame
 Rag'd in his bosom, and its peace consum'd.
 Ibid. v. 54.

Accordingly

Accordingly in the reflections, he makes with design to support his mind, and shake off his ill-fated passion, he is so far under the absolute dominion of it, that the thoughts, which first occur, are such as serve to stagger his resolution instead of confirming it.

Can I, O wisdom, seek relief from thee,

Who dost approve my passion? v. 57.

And after the utmost contention of mind he is forced to conclude in absolute perplexity

—despair and fortune be my guides. v. 89.

ARIANA is still a less exceptionable subject of pity, as we do not so much require in that sex firmness of temper to resist these soft impressions. Her despair and violent resolution in consequence of it are the effects of an excess of passion very natural to the serious and thoughtful turn of her character.

THIS episode is a shining ornament in the poem, as such a tender scene is a judicious relief to the severity, which is the general cast of the work, and is founded upon a kind of distress, which Aristotle expressly prefers, such as arises from some error in a person of great and conspicuous worth *. Too frequent a representation of calamities absolutely unavoidable

E 3

serve

* Ο μήτε ἀρετῇ διαφέρων, καὶ δικαιοσύνη, μήτε διὰ κακίαν καὶ μοχθηρίαν μεταβάλλων εἰς τὴν δυστυχίαν, ἀλλὰ δι' ἀμαρτίαν πινὰ τῶν ἐν μεγάλῃ δόξῃ ὄντων καὶ εὐτυχία. Poët. c. 13.

serve only to deject the spirits, and create a disrelish for life. But such as are grounded upon pardonable errors, whether excess of any passion, or defect of judgment, instruct, while they excite commiseration.

HOWEVER representations of necessary distress are also improving, as they serve to caution against precipitate confidence. But such examples are still more useful, when they also contribute to excite our horror at such calamities, as a good man ought to fly from at the risk of the greatest personal dangers. Thus absurd is that scheme of poetic justice, which has been raised upon the forecited words of Aristotle; as if the way to make men pass through life with integrity was to impose upon their unwary minds in youth, and misrepresent that world, wherein the only means to preserve a steady and upright conduct, is to be apprized of the evils and follies, we must encounter, and to have a heart prepared to resist both.

POLYDORUS, the attendant upon Ariana, is an example of an heroic spirit so oppressed by the flower of his age being wasted in slavery, as to have lost all taste of life. In less elevated characters long continued calamity debases the mind, and confines its wishes to mean gratifications; but in the generous breast of Polydorus it ends in unfurmoun-
table grief. The only pleasure, to which we find him sensible, is revenge.

Close

Close by the hero Polydorus waits
 To guide destruction through the Asian tents.
 As the young eagle near his parent's side
 In wanton flight essays his vig'rous wings,
 E'er long with her to penetrate the clouds,
 To dart impetuous on the fleecy train,
 And dye his beak with gore ; by Sparta's king
 The injur'd Polydorus thus prepares
 His arm for death, and feasts his angry soul
 With promis'd vengeance: his impatient thoughts
 Ev'n now transport him furious to the seat
 Of his long sorrows, not with shackled hands,
 But now once more a Spartan with his shield,
 And dreadful spear to lead his country's bands,
 And with them vengeance.

B. 8. v. 346.

IN Demaratus, the exiled king of Sparta, we
 have another example of unmerited distress, but
 of a more delicate kind. He, cherished in a lux-
 urious court with all the ordinary means of enjoy-
 ment in his power, pines away at the sense of being
 out of a condition to act worthy of himself. In his
 interview with Polydorus he even suspects and la-
 ments a diminution of his virtue.

Say, that ev'n here, where all are kings or slaves,
 Amid the riot of flagitious courts

Not quite extinct the Spartan spirit glows

Within his breast, though grief hath dim'd its
 fires.

B. 6. v. 301.

Before, in his conversation with Xerxes, though at
 first he endeavours to speak of his countrymen with

as much reserve as possible ; yet we soon see his admiration of their virtues carry him out with great freedom in their praises, and he cannot refrain drawing the parallel between the military force of Greece and of Asia in terms very disagreeable to the monarch, whose protection he was forced to accept ; and in the end breaks into a flood of tears.

Aside

His head he turn'd, and wept in copious streams.
The sad remembrance of his former state,
His dignity, his greatness, and the sight
Of those brave ranks, which thus unshaken stood,
And spread amazement through the world in
arms,

Excite those sorrows. Oft with eager eyes
He views the godlike warriors, who beneath
His standard once victorious fought, who call'd
Him once their king and leader. Then again
His head he bows with anguish, and bedews
His breast with tears ; in agony bemoans
His faded honours, his illustrious name
Forgotten now, his majesty defil'd
With exile and dependance. So obscur'd
By creeping ivy, and by sordid moss
Some lordly palace, or stupendous fane,
Magnificent in ruin stands ; where time
Wide-wasting from the nodding roof hath mow'd
The column down, and cleft the pond'rous dome.

B. 3. v. 657.

We ought not to pass over another observation upon this dialogue ; the great distinctness with which

which the argument is here explained. The poet has been able to give every proof its due place and force unrestrained by the numbers of his verse.

—————Nor in fields of war
The Greeks excel by discipline alone,
But from their manners. Grant thy ear, O king,
The diff'rence learn of Grecian bands and thine.
The flow'r, the bulwark of thy pow'rful host
Are mercenaries. These are canton'd round
Thy provinces. No fertile field demands
Their painful hand to turn the fallow glebe.
Them to the noon-day toil no harvest calls.
The stubborn oak along the mountain's brow
Sinks not beneath their stroke. With careful eyes
They mark not how the flocks, or heifers feed.
To them of wealth, and all possession void
The name of country with an empty sound
Flies o'er the ear, nor warms their joyless hearts,
Who share no country. Needy, yet with scorn
Rejecting labour, wretched by their wants,
Yet profligate through indolence, with limbs
Soft and enervate, and with minds corrupt;
From misery, debauchery, and sloth
Are these to battel drawn against a foe
Inur'd to hardship, and the child of toil,
Wont through the freezing show'r, and wintry
storm
O'er his own glebe the tardy ox to goad;
Or in the sun's impetuous heat to glow
Beneath the burthen of the yellow sheaves:
Whence on himself, on her, whose faithful arms
Infold

gour of mind, by which these heroes are supported, place them quite out of the sight of pity; not a single circumstance suggests a thought of their being unhappy: on the contrary they are continually the objects of our admiration, almost of our envy. This ardent spirit shines out most eminently in Leonidas, their chief; but from him diffuses itself through them all: though there is not a single leader of eminence among them, which the poet has not mark'd with a character peculiarly his own.

THE active vigour of Alpheus is very distinct from the deliberate valour of Dienece.

THE ambition of Megistias is confined to merit the esteem of the people, by whom he is entertained. Upon this principle he animates his son in the fourth book, and the same is his motive for sharing their last fate.

THE silence, with which Menalippus obeys the command of his aged father to provide for his own safety, is, I think, very judiciously imagined. For though it is not necessary, that every gallant man should have the resolution to make a voluntary sacrifice of his life; yet the want of the same high spirit, by which the rest are animated, must impress on him that consciousness of his inferiority, and create that degree of confusion, which of necessity must close his lips.

THE

THE gentle and polite character of Agis renders him in particular worthy the intimate friendship of the great Leonidas; in whom humanity and a genteel turn of mind distinguish themselves among his more sublime virtues.

THE fierceness of Diomedon makes indignation and high contempt of an effeminate enemy, whom he had formerly seen to fly before him, a ruling motive in his conduct.

Enrag'd the stern Diomedon replies.

Thou servile, base dependant on a king,

Inglorious mercenary, slave to those,

Whom most we scorn, thou boaster, dost thou know,

That I beheld the Marathonian field;

When, like the Libyan sands before the wind,

Your host was scatter'd by th' unconquer'd Greeks;

Where thou perhaps didst turn before this arm

To ignominious flight thy shiv'ring limbs?

B. 2. v. 411.

IN Demophilus we see a speculative temper, where cool reflection supports an aged mind, and supplies the fire of youth. This draws from him those instructive sentiments, which he utters over the body of Phraortes.

Alas! how glorious were that bleeding breast,

Had justice giv'n the buckler to thy arm,

And to preserve a people bade thee die!

Who now shall mourn thee! Thy ungrateful
king Will

Will soon forget thy worth. Thy native land
 For thee no sumptuous monument shall raise
 Of public sorrow ; thy recorded name
 No sighs among thy countrymen shall wake
 For their lost hero : what to them avail'd
 Thy might and dauntless spirit ? Not to guard
 Their wives and offspring from the spoil of war,
 Not from their walls repel the hostile blaze,
 Nor desolation from their fruitful fields,
 But to extend oppression didst thou fall ;
 Perhaps with inborn virtues in thy heart,
 Which, but thy angry destiny forbade,
 By freedom cherish'd might have blest'd mankind.
 All-bounteous nature ! thy impartial laws
 To no selected race of men confine
 The sense of glory, fortitude, and all
 The nobler passions, which inspire the mind,
 And render life illustrious. These thou plant'st
 In ev'ry soil. But freedom, like the sun,
 Must warm the gen'rous seeds. By her alone
 They bloom and flourish ; while oppression blasts
 The tender virtues : hence a spurious growth,
 False honour, savage valour taint the soul,
 And wild ambition : hence rapacious pow'r,
 The ravag'd earth unpeoples, and the brave,
 A feast for dogs, bestrew th' insanguin'd plain.

B. 4. v. 320.

There is the same air in the short address at his
 first interview with Leonidas. And the same ap-
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 and

and all his troops to accompany Leonidas in his last fate.

O king of Sparta, pride of human race,
Whom none e'er equall'd, but the seed of Jove,
Thy own forefather number'd with the Gods,
Lo! I am old. With faltring steps I tread
The prone descent of years. The winged hours
By me, as one unequal to their speed,
Who can no more their fleeting joys attain,
Unheeding slide. My youth my country claim'd.
My age no more can serve her? what remains?
What eligible hope can wisdom form,
But to die well? Upon this glorious earth
With thee, unrivall'd hero, will I close
The eve of life.

B. 7. v. 194.

The sublimity of this character distinguishably appears by his behaviour upon this occasion toward his kinsman Dithyrambus.

The aged Megistias will not permit his son to finish his life with himself. But though Demophilus bears the affection of a parent to his nephew; the superiour turn of his mind makes him fonder of the glory, than of the life of Dithyrambus.

To him Demophilus. Wilt thou too bleed,
My Dithyrambus?—But I here withhold
All counsel from thee, who art wise, as brave.
If then thy magnanimity retain
Thee too with great Leonidas to fall,
At either's side our limbs shall press the ground,
And drop together in the arms of death;
So if th' attentive traveller we draw

To

To our cold reliques, wondring shall he trace
 The diff'rent scene, and pregnant with applause,
 O wise old man, exclaim, thou well hast chose
 The hour of fate : and O unequall'd youth,
 Who to thy country didst thy bloom devote,
 May'st thou remain for ever dear to fame !
 May time rejoice to name thee ! and may peace
 With gentlest pinions hover o'er thy urn !

This said, the hero with his lifted shield
 His face o'er shades, and drops a silent tear ;
 Not this the tear of anguish, but deriv'd
 From fond affection grown mature with time ;
 Which in a feebler mind to pain had turn'd,
 But in the Thespian's firm and virtuous breast
 Alone a manly tenderness awak'd
 Unmixt with pity, or with vain regret. *Ib. v. 220.*

DITHYRAMBUS possesses in an eminent degree
 the amiable character of high merit accompanied
 with equal modesty. His ambition is ever to de-
 serve praise rather than receive it. He chuses Di-
 omедon for his constant companion in action, his
 wish being to equal the greatest. And at the same
 time he is an admirer of all virtue but his own.
 When Diomedon presents him at the head of the
 Platæan troops, as

————— around him croud
 The hoary warriors their unnumber'd scars
 Before his sight presenting, and recount
 Their various dangers ; he their wounds surveys
 With veneration, nor disdains to hear
 The oft-repeated tale. *B. 4. v. 503.* This

This moderation, and delicacy of mind create that reluctance, with which he engages Teribafus, whose virtues, though in an enemy, he held in high esteem. In this scene the poet has brought together several characters, and supported each with great success. The gloomy cast of mind, which ever accompanied Teribafus, here appears without breaking his spirit. The impatience, with which Hyperanthes advances forward, when he hopes to see his friend victorious, the eagerness, with which he flies to revenge upon his disappointment, and the sudden suspense of that resolution to assist his dying friend, with the return of his indignation, as soon as his friend expires, are strong effects of that warmth of heart becoming a firm amity. And while Dithyrambus stood

—— reclin'd in sadness o'er his shield,

And in the pride of victory repin'd,

Nor markt the threatening foe, B. 5. v. 338.

Diomedon advances to support him in the full spirit of his character.

Hold thee, Barbarian, from a life more worth

Than thee, and Xerxes with his host of slaves.

v. 343.

The respective characters of these two heroes are also well preserved in the manner, wherein each takes his resolution to share the glory with Leonidas in his fatal catastrophe. The fierce intrepidity of Diomedon prompts him to appear the foremost of all in this high-spirited resolution. And Dithyrambus with the modesty peculiar to his character is solicitous to throw an humble shade over his own glory.

Nor

Nor too aspiring let my hopes be deem'd ;
 Should the Barbarian in his triumphs mark
 My youthful limbs among the gory heaps,
 Thence may his fears be doubled, when again
 He meets in fields hereafter to be known
 The Grecian standards, trembling at a foe,
 To whom the flow'r, and blooming joys of life
 Are less alluring than a noble fate. B. 7. v. 212.

FOR brevity I pass over the lesser characters of the poem ; though they also are distinctly markt. The savage fierceness of Phraortes, the vain arrogance of Tigranes, the diffidence and hypocrisy of Anaxander, and the confidence in villany of Epialtes are very manifest.

THE character of Leonidas is the most distinctly exhibited of any, being placed in a greater variety of lights. We see him in council, in the army, in his family, and in his retirements. His first appearance in the Spartan council shews us the ruling principle of his mind. The general principle, upon which valiant and heroic actions are founded, is, that there are occasions, which make it reasonable to put life in hazard. And we daily see this principle exerted in very different degrees in proportion to the measure of courage and spirit of different men. But Leonidas extends this principle so far, and has formed so exalted a conception of virtue, as to think it necessary for a great man to place the desire of life wholly out of the question.

F

Why

Why do we labour through the arduous paths,
 Which lead to virtue? Fruitless were the toil,
 Above the reach of human feet were plac'd
 The distant summit, if the fear of death
 Could intercept our passage. But in vain
 His blackest frowns and terrors he assumes
 To shake the firmness of the mind, which knows,
 That wanting virtue life is pain and woe,
 That wanting liberty ev'n virtue mourns,
 And looks around for happiness in vain.
 Then speak, O Sparta, and demand my life;
 My heart exulting answers to thy call,
 And smiles on glorious fate, To live with fame
 The gods allow to many; but to die
 With equal lustre, is a blessing, heaven
 Selects from all the choicest boons of fate,
 And with a sparing hand on few bestows.

B. I. v. 129.

It is upon this foot, that notwithstanding the character of Leonidas is raised so far above that of other men, yet it appears absolutely natural; because his motives are not of a different nature from those of others, but only improved in degree.

When Leonidas is retired, and the warmth of heart excited by the public presence is abated, that he is left without restraint to his cool reflections, the poet has taken care not to outrage his character by divesting him of human nature; but we see those struggles, which must necessarily pass through the mind of the greatest man upon so extraordinary an occasion. Here he is not without
 natural

natural fears ; but has a spirit in his most deliberate moments to overcome them. His principal motive is the public good ; though he is also not insensible to the fame, which must accompany so meritorious an action.

——Lo ! thy country calls.

O sacred voice I hear thee ! at that sound
Returning virtue brightens in my heart ;
Fear vanishes before her. Death, receive
My unreluctant hand, and lead me on.
Thou too, O fame, attendant on my fall,
With wings unwearied shalt protect my tomb,
Nor time himself shall violate my praise.

B. 1. v. 229.

Cold men have considered this sublime degree of that desire of praise, which is implanted in our nature, as a weakness : but it is certainly a part of Leonidas's character to hold it in high esteem ; for as he has recourse to it for the support of his own mind, so in his first speech to his followers on their arrival at Thermopylæ he excites them to act with their utmost vigour upon the same motives.

——You, my valiant friends,

Now rouse the gen'rous spirit, which inflames
Your hearts, now prove the vigour of your arms :
That your recorded actions may survive
Within the breasts of all the brave and free,
And sound delightful in the ear of time,
As long as Neptune beats the Malian bay,
Or those tall cliffs erect their shaggy tops
So near to heav'n, your monuments of fame.

B. 2. v. 158,
In

In his family another part of his character appears. He is there tender and affectionate, but still able to suppress the secret motions of his own heart, when it was necessary for inspiring his queen with spirit to support a calamity unavoidable. And accordingly, he does in part raise and calm her mind. But when the sudden warning for his departure has renewed her grief, that she faints in his arms, and he is left, as it were, alone to himself; he breaks out into a degree of tenderness, that shews all his foregoing resolution to be the effect of true firmness of mind, not of insensibility.

She sinks. On ev'ry side his children press,
Hang on his knees, and kiss his honour'd hand.
His soul no longer struggles to confine
Its strong compunction. Down the hero's cheek,
Down flows the manly sorrow. Great in woe
Amid his children, who inclose him round,
He stands indulging tenderness and love
In graceful tears. When thus with lifted eyes
Address'd to heav'n: Thou ever-living pow'r,
Look down propitious, sire of gods and men,
And to this faithful woman, whose desert
May claim thy favour, grant the hours of peace!
And thou, my great forefather, son of Jove,
O Hercules, neglect not these, thy race!
But since that spirit, I from thee derive,
Now bears me from them to resistless fate,
Do thou support their virtue! be they taught,
Like thee, with glorious labour life to grace,
And from their father let them learn to die!

B. I. v. 365.
We

We next see him before the general council of Greece. And here he acts a new part. In the Spartan council he exerts a spirit and vigour, that commands all who hear him; but now he gives his advice with the moderation of one more disposed to be directed than authoritatively to influence an assembly, to whose prudence the general states of the country had intrusted the conduct of their affairs.

He is next brought into the field, and shewn in the midst of those dangers, to which for the public service he had so freely offered himself. And here the same resolution supports him to perform with the greatest coolness all the offices of a skilful and prudent commander, to contemn in his last hours every peril, and to meet his fate with no less firmness than that, wherewith he first accepted of it at a distance in the council of Sparta.

THUS I think our author in his principal Grecian heroes, and most eminently in Leonidas their leader, has represented with singular strength, and truth, virtuous characters of high spirit superior to the greatest misfortunes; which is an atchievement, Plato thought the most difficult of all poeti imitation *.

* Τὸ μὲν πολλὴν μίμησιν καὶ ποικίλῃν ἔχει τὸ ἀγαθὸν πικρὸν τὸ δὲ φρονιμὸν τε καὶ ἡσυχίον ἡδύ, παραπλήσιον ἐν αἰσὶ αὐτὸ αὐτῷ, ὃ ῥαῖδον μιμήσαδ'ς. Republ. l. 10.

SECTION V.

Of the language of poetry.

THE next thing to be considered in an epic poem after the fable and characters is the language. Aristotle puts the merit of language in general upon the avoiding obscurity and meanness. Certainly nothing can excuse want of perspicuity; since the first intention of writing is to be understood. Obscurity is occasioned, either when the thoughts are expressed defectively, or by ambiguities, by constructions and rangement of the words, which the language does not easily admit, or lastly by forced metaphors. But on the other hand, to raise the language above the style of ordinary discourse it is necessary to make use of metaphors, and other tropes, as also of less common constructions. For by these means of declining the most obvious forms of expression the language will receive grace and dignity.

Critics of note have placed the very essence of poetry in such an artificial turn of expression*.

BUT

* *C'est en quoi consiste le grand art de la poésie de dire figurément presque tout ce qu'elle dit.* Rapin Reflex. sur la poétique en general. §. 29.

Il ne faut rien exprimer sur la scène, qu'avec figures, &c. Aubignac. l. 4. ch. 7.

BUT these methods of raising the language are also required in prose writings. Aristotle gives much the same precepts for supporting and adorning the style of prose with this restriction only, that the poetic diction admits of these less received forms of speech in a greater degree *. Therefore we must go a little farther to determine the essential difference between the style of poetry and prose by considering the particular intention of each kind of writing.

Aristotle would place the essence of the art in imitation †. But this excludes all descriptive poetry; and accordingly he directs the epic poet to introduce his characters, and write in dialogue, as much as possible, for this reason, that, when the poet speaks himself, he is not an imitator. Plato has more justly distinguished, that some kinds of poetry consist wholly in imitation as tragedy and comedy, some in narration only, where the poet speaks in his own person, as odes, whereas some, as the epic, contain a mixture of both ‡.

Others give this characteristic, that the design of all poetry is to please. Thus Hermogenes attempts to excuse Homer in representing Jupiter

F 4

under

* Rhetor. l. 3. c. 2. † Poëtic. c. 1.

Αὐτὸν δ' αἶ τὸν ποιητὴν ἐλάχεια λέγειν· οὐ γάρ οὔτε κατὰ ταῦτα μιμητής. Ibid. c. 24.

‡ ὅτι τῆς ποιήσεως ἡ μὲν διὰ μιμήσεως ὅλη ἐστίν, ἅπασες τραγωδία τε, καὶ κωμωδία· ἡ δὲ δι' ἀπαγγελίας αὐτῆς τῆς ποιήσεως, εὐρεῖς δ' ἂν αὐτῷ μάλιστα πού ἐν διδυράμβοις. ἡ δ' αὖ δι' ἀμφοτέρων ἐν τε τῇ πῶν ἐπὶ ποιήσει, πολλὰ καὶ δι' αἰλλοῦσι. Republ. l. 3.

under a circumstance unworthy a divinity by saying, that poetry chiefly intends to give delight *. And from Strabo we learn, that Eratosthenes much earlier had asserted, that every poet directed his whole view to entertain, not to instruct †.

This notion of poetry seems to have given a very disadvantageous idea of it to men of a serious turn of mind, who are apt to consider it merely as an amusement, or even more adapted to corrupt, than to improve the world. Plato under this pretence charges the art with being expressly appropriated to captivate and mislead the understanding; comparing both poetry and oratory to the delicacies of cookery, where much less regard is had to the preservation of health, than to the luxurious gratification of the palate ‡. But Horace has distinguished, that the design of poetry may either be to instruct, or to entertain ||. Some kinds indeed are chiefly intended to entertain, such as sonnets, festival odes, georgics, and other kinds of descriptive poetry. And these species ought certainly to be ranked amongst the principal of those arts, whereby the natural enjoyments of human life are improved. For if lofty woods, spacious gardens, and sumptuous buildings

* Τὸ πλεῖστον δὲ ἡδονῆς ἢ ποίησις, οἷμαι, σοχαΐσαι.
De form. orat. l. i. c. 6.

† Ποιητῶν ἔστι πάντα σοχαΐας ψυχαγωγίας, οὐ δὲ δασκαλίας. Geogr. l. i. p. 15.

‡ In Gorg.

|| Aut prodesse volunt, aut delectare poëtae. De Art. poet. v. 333.

buildings are reasonable means of enjoyment, an art, that can raise in our minds pleasing images of these, and other objects of delight in the absence of those objects, must deserve a suitable place in our esteem. Human life is divided between what is usually called business and pleasure. The happiness of men depends chiefly on providing for the necessary demands of nature, and obeying the dictates of our serious affections towards our family, friends, and country; consequently such pursuits demand the gross of our time; and all other personal gratifications ought to give place to these. But as the first engage us in a course of laborious application; without intervals of relaxation and pleasing diversions it will be difficult to support that cheerfulness of mind, which is requisite towards success in our most important concerns. Those poetic amusements therefore, which promise no more than relief from the fatigues of business, are far from being unprofitable, or the least unworthy of diligent cultivation. But as the part of poetry, which relates to human life, and the conduct of men, is however of a much more noble kind; we must here endeavour to establish such a characteristic of the art, as may comprehend the whole compass of it.

Fracastorius* has attempted this in terms, which are certainly general enough; but they have little meaning. According to him, whereas the orator, historian, or other prose author can be considered

as

* In dialog. de Poëtic.

as writing well only with regard to some particular intention, the poet alone can be said to write well simply, and without any limitation.

Strabo in opposition to the assertion of Eratosthenes above mentioned * says, the ancients considered poetry as a kind of philosophy intended for instruction, but adds, in conjunction with giving pleasure †. Aristotle has a similar expression in his definition of tragedy, that it is to be accompanied *ἡδυσμῶν λόγῳ*, with a pleasing language; but means no more, than that it have the grateful harmony of poetic numbers ‡. If Strabo's words are understood in this sense, they contribute nothing to our present inquiry: but in any more extensive meaning, since all writers have certainly a design to please their readers, which is necessary to gain their attention, while we are not told, upon what particular principle the poet proceeds for this end, we are still left ignorant of the essence of the art.

Indeed a clear and distinct idea of the specific difference between the poet and prose writer is not to be represented in any such general terms. This difference depends upon the express make of the human mind. By the understanding we receive knowledge; by that sensibility of the mind, which we have above || considered under the name of temper,

* pag. 72.

† Τὸ ὑναντῖον δ' οἱ παλαιοὶ φιλοσοφίαν πρὸς λέγουσι πρῶτον τὴν ποιητικὴν, εἰσάγουσαν εἰς τὸν βίον ἡμᾶς ἐκ νέων, καὶ διδάσκουσιν ἔθνη, καὶ παῖδες, καὶ πρῶτοι μὲν ἡδονῆς. Geogr. l. i. p. 15.

‡ Poët. c. 6. || pag. 12.

temper, we are affected with some degree of pleasure or disgust from almost every object. And as the first intention of writing and studied discourse was to form the manners of mankind, to prevail on them to unite in society, and to inspire them with esteem and emulation of actions useful to others; so to fix the attention of an uncultivated race it was not only necessary to gain the ear by the harmony of poetic numbers, but also, as much as possible, to work upon the passions. When mankind became improved, a more particular record of past actions, and a more distinct discussion of opinions came in use. For these subjects more expressly designed to inform the understanding a stile was chosen unconfined by the measures of verse. I think therefore we may thus distinguish the offices of poetry and prose, that prose primarily proposes to instruct the understanding, and poetry to affect the temper.

I do not here mean, that all prose writing must be simply didactic, or that the poet must never appear to instruct by design; but that the poet is always to remember, that his office is to exhibit continually sensible images of things, and the writer or speaker in prose, that he is addressing himself to the rational faculty. Though orators do often expatiate upon subjects suited to move the passions, and on those occasions make such an enumeration of particulars, whereby the image or picture of the thing described may break in upon the mind of the hearer with greater brightness and force; yet

Longinus

Longinus has judiciously distinguished between the design of poetic and oratorial imagery; that the scope of the first is ever to strike the imagination, whereas a greater degree of evidence is the proper intention of the latter *.

Indeed upon this principle we may judge of the difference between all poetic and prose descriptions. For example, if the historian describe a river, a mountain, or a country, he ought to mention chiefly those circumstances, which may make, what he has afterwards to say of them, understood; but the poet must draw a picture of the thing by an enumeration of such particulars, as would strike the eye or other senses of a person present. In giving such images or pictures, the great art of poetic description consists.

Upon this ground Hermogenes remarks, that a minute entrance into particulars is required in poetry, which in history would appear trifling, or at best indicate a degree of simplicity quite void of art †.

If

* ἕτερόν τι ἢ ῥητορικὴ φαντασίᾳ βούλεται, καὶ ἕτερον ἢ παρὰ ποιηταῖς, — ἢ μὴ ἐν ποιήσει τέλει ἐστὶν ἐκπληξίς, ἢ δ' ἐν λόγοις ἐνέργεια. Longin. περὶ ὑψους §. 14.

† Ἀφελές δὲ καὶ ποιητικὸν ὁμῶς, καὶ τὸ λεπτῶς εἰς τὰ κατὰ μέρος εἶναι οἶον, Κνύση δ' ἕρπυλλον ἢ κεν ἐλισσομένη περὶ κατὰ, καὶ ὅτι ὁ δῖος ἢ δῖος οὐποσὶ ἀπὸ κ-
τανε, καὶ ὅτι κύμβαλον ἐν κονίῃ πέσῃ, καὶ ὅτι ἀδ-
μαίνων, καὶ ὅσα τοιαῦτα. ἐν μὴ γὰρ ποιήσει χρήσιμα,
ἐν ἰσοείᾳ δὲ εὐτέλειαν ποιεῖ. πλὴν ἐνθα ἂν ἀφελῶς πε-
πάνυ βούλοιτο τὴν ἰσοείαν γράφειν. De Form. orat.
l. 2. c. 10.

If we examine some of the strongest of the descriptions in Homer, we shall find, they strike us, not by any artificial, or unexpected turn of expression, but purely by the simple enumeration of the circumstances, which would first and principally affect a beholder, and that the true excellence of his diction consists in the choice of such words, as are fitted to express those circumstances most fully, and most distinctly.

Ὡς δ' ὅτε χεῖμα ῥοεὶ ποταμοὶ καὶ ὄρεσσι ῥέοντες
 ἔς μετὰ γαίαν συμπάλλετον ὄβριμον ὕδωρ
 Κρυῶν ἐκ μεγάλων, κοίλῃς ὑποδὲ χαράδρῃς,
 τῶν δὲ τι πηλὸς δ' ὕψους ἐν ὕρισιν ἔκλυε ποίμην *.

Il. Δ. 452.

Ὡς δ' ὅτ' ἐν ἑραῷ ἄστρα φαεινὴν ἀμφὶ σελήνῃ
 φαίνετ' ἀειπριπία, ὅτε τ' ἔπλετο νήνεμος αἰθήρ,
 ἔκ τ' ἔφανον πᾶσαι σκοπαὶ, καὶ πρῶντες ἄκροι,
 καὶ νάπαι· ἑρανόθεν δ' ἄρ' ὑπερρώγη ἄσπετος αἰθήρ.
 Πάντα δὲ τ' εἶδεται ἄστρα· γέγηθε δὲ τι φρένα ποί-
 μην †.

Il. Θ. 555.

— ὁλοοίτερχ· ὥς ἀπὸ πίτρης,

οὔτε κατὰ στεφάνης πύλας χεῖμα ῥοεὶ ὥσθι.

Ῥήξας

* As when two winter torrents rushing from great fountains down the hills through rocky channels into the vale, where they dash together their impetuous streams, that the shepherd hears the sound afar off among the mountains—

† As when in the heavens the stars shine with full brightness round the resplendent moon, the air being serene and broke away from the very skies, that all the eminencies, crags, and woody dales among the hills become conspicuous, and the heart of the shepherd rejoices—

ῥήξας ἀπὸ τῆς ὀμβρῆς ἀναιδέως ἔχματα πέτρης,
 ἣν τ' ἀναδρώσκων πέτεται, κλυπείει δὲ θ' ὑπ' αὐτῆς
 ὕλη· ὃ δ' ἀσφαλές διείη ἔμπροσθεν, ὅφρ' αὖν ἵκηται
 εἰς ὄπισθεν. τότε δ' ἔπι κυλίνδεται, ἐαυμένος περ*.

Il. N. 137.

—ὡς ὅτε κύμα θοῇ ἐν νηὶ πίσησι
 λάβρον ὑπαὶ νεφέων ἀνεμοϊρεφές, ἥ δέ τε πᾶσα
 Ἀχὴν ὑπεκρύφθη, αἱ ἐμοιο δὲ δεινὸς αἴτης
 ἱεῖω ἐμβρέμεται, τρομέεσσι δὲ τε θρένα νάυται
 δειδιότες, πύθον γὰρ ὑπ' ἐκ θανάτοιο φέρονται †.

Il. O. 624.

—————λύκοι ὥς
 ὦμοφάγοι, τοῖσιν τε πρὸς ὄρεσιν ἀσπελὶς ἀλκή,
 οἳ τ' ἐλαφον κεραδὺν μέγαν ἤρεσι δηώσαντες
 δάπλυσιν· πᾶσιν δὲ πορρήϊον αἶμα πφοινδόν,
 καὶ τ' ἀγελήδων ἱάσιν ἀπὸ κρήνης μελανύδρου
 λάφοντες γλώσσησιν ἀραιῇσιν μέλαν ὕδωρ
 ἄκρον, ἐρευνόμενοι φόβον αἵματος· ἐσθ' δὲ γε θυμὸς
 σπῆδεσιν ἀτρομός· ὅστις πρὸς ἐνέται δὲ τε γαστήρ †.

Il. II. 156.

A

* As a destructive stone, when a winter torrent increased by immense rains has loosened the holds of the rugged fragment, is driven from the summit of some rock, and flies by lofty bounds with force irresistible to the plain, while the woods re-echo; but there stops, however impelled on before.—

† As when a billow generated by the winds rushes with violence into a ship, the whole vessel is covered with foam, the dreadful blast roars in the sails, and the hearts of the mariners tremble, but just escaping death—

† Like ravenous wolves of immense spirit, who after feasting on a large horned stag, which they had made their

A similar simplicity appears in these descriptions of Virgil.

*Qualis populeæ mærens Philomela sub umbra
Amisſos quæritur fœtus, quos durus arator,
Observans, nido implumes detraxit; at illa
Flet noctem, ramoque ſedens miſerabile carmen
Integrat, et mœſtis late loca queſtibus implet*.*

Georg. l. 4. v. 511,

*Hic, ubi diſjectas moles, avulſaque ſaxis
Saxa vides, miſtoque undantem pulvere fumum,
Neptunus muros, magnoque emota tridenti
Fundamenta quatit, totamque a ſedibus urbem
Eruit: hic Juno Scæas ſæviſſima portas
Prima tenet; ſociumque furens a navibus agmen
Ferro accincta vocat:*

*Jam ſummas arces Tritonia, respice, Pallas
Inſedit nimbo effulgens, et Gorgone ſæva:*

*Ipſe pater Danaïſ animos, viresque ſecundas
Sufficit; ipſe deos in Dardana ſuſcitāt arma†.*

Æn. l. 2. v. 608.

their prey on the mountains, troop together to ſome fountain with jaws diſtained with blood, there ſtand intrepid, diſcharging gore, and lapping the ſurface of the water with expanded tongues, till their ſides diſtend.

* As Philomela moaning under a poplar ſhade bewails her loſt young, which a relentless peaſant, obſerving their neſt, had taken away yet unfledged; ſhe laments all the night, and ſitting on a branch renews her piteous ſtrain, and fills all around with her mournful complaint.

† Here, where you ſee piles of building overthrown, with ſtones rent from ſtones, and ſmoke waving with mingled

Some of the most shining descriptions in our greatest poet are delivered in a like simple form of expression.

—He (Satan) his wonted pride
 Soon recollecting, with high words, that bore
 Semblance of worth, not substance, gently rais'd
 Their fainting courage, and dispell'd their fears,
 Then strait commands, that at the warlike sound
 Of trumpets loud and clarions be uprear'd
 His mighty standard. That proud honour claim'd
 Azazel as his right, a cherub tall,
 Who forthwith from the glittering staff unfurl'd
 Th' imperial ensign, which full high advanc'd
 Shone like a meteor streaming to the wind
 With gems and golden lustre rich emblaz'd,
 Seraphic arms and trophies ; all the while
 Sonorous metal blowing martial sounds ;
 At which the universal host up sent
 A shout, that tore hell's concave, and beyond
 Frighted the reign of Chaos and old Night.
 All in a moment through the gloom were seen
 Ten thousand banners rise into the air

With

mingled dust, there Neptune shakes the walls and the foundations loosened by his vast trident, rooting up the whole city from its seat. Here vindictive Juno in arms has seized upon the Scæan gate, and furious calls her associate bands, from their ships. Now behold Tritonian Pallas on the summit of the citadel in a radiant cloud, and with her direful Gorgon. Jupiter himself supplies the Greeks with spirit and successful strength ; himself stirs up the gods against the Trojan arms.

With orient colours waving ; with them rose
 A forest huge of spears ; and thronging helms
 Appear'd, and serried shields in thick array
 Of depth immeasurable. Anon they move
 In perfect phalanx to the Dorian mood
 Of flutes and soft recorders, such as rais'd
 To height of noblest temper heroes old
 Arming to battle, and instead of rage
 Deliberate valour breath'd, firm and unmov'd
 With dread of death to flight, or foul retreat ;
 Nor wanting pow'r to mitigate and 'swage
 With solemn touches troubled thoughts, and chase
 Anguish and doubt, and fear, and sorrow, and pain
 From mortal or immortal minds. Thus they
 Breathing united force with fixed thought
 Mov'd on in silence to soft pipes, that charm'd
 Their painful steps o'er the burnt soil. And now
 Advanc'd in view they stand a horrid front
 Of dreadful length, and dazzling arms in guise
 Of warriors old with order'd spear and shield
 Awaiting what command their mighty chief
 Had to impose.

Paradise lost, B. i. v. 527.

Two of far nobler shape, erect and tall,
 Godlike erect ! with native honour clad
 In naked majesty seem'd lords of all,
 And worthy seem'd ; for in their looks divine
 The image of their glorious maker shone,
 Truth, wisdom, sanctitude severe and pure ;
 Severe, but in true filial freedom plac'd,
 Whence true authority in men. Though both,

G

Not

Not equal, as their sex not equal seem'd.
 For contemplation he, and valour form'd ;
 For softness she, and sweet attractive grace ;
 He for God only ; she for God in him.
 His fair large front, and eye sublime declar'd
 Absolute rule ; and hyacinthin looks
 Round from his parted forelock manly hung
 Clustering, but not beneath his shoulders broad.
 She, as a veil, down to the slender waist
 Her unadorned golden tresses wore,
 Dishevel'd, but in wanton ringlets wav'd,
 As the vine curls her tendrils, which imply'd
 Subjection, but requir'd with gentle sway,
 And by her yielded, by him best receiv'd,
 Yielded with coy submission, modest pride,
 And sweet, reluctant, amorous delay.

Ib. B. 4. v. 288.

As one, who long in populous city pent,
 Where houses thick and sewers annoy the air,
 Forth issuing on a summer's morn to breathe
 Among the pleasant villages, and farms
 Adjoin'd, from each thing met conceives delight,
 The smell of grain, of tedded grass, or kine,
 Or dairy, each rural sight, each rural sound.
 If chance with nymph-like step fair virgin pass,
 What pleasing seem'd, for her now pleases more,
 She most, and in her look sums all delight.

Ibid. B. 9. v. 445.

I have been thus particular in these instances to
 shew, that the essence of poetry consists not in high
 figures, or gaudy phrases. For it is very evident,

that the poetic spirit of all these passages is little owing to what few figurative expressions may be found in them, but to the distinct and lively enumeration made, though in simple terms, of the circumstances accompanying the thing described. A pomp and clatter of sounding words, where care is not taken to preserve a clear meaning in them, however they may amuse a negligent reader, serve only to darken the picture intended to be drawn instead of brightening it. Figurative phrases answer very often in poetry, as well as in prose, no better purpose than to cloak over obscurity in our ideas.

The essence of poetry consists so much in making a due impression upon the imagination, that a single word productive of that effect, such as *nudus ara, fere nudus**, shall give a poetic turn to the plainest thought. Whatever artifice may be ascribed to such expressions from their being figurative, I think it manifest, that none of these phrases receive their poetic air from thence, but from their raising in the mind a sensible image of the action referred to. As it is by this, that the poet distinguishes himself from the writer in prose; whatever be the style, whether proper or figurative, where-with this is performed, it is equally the language of poetry.

UPON this principle is founded, that more frequent use of epithets in poetry, than what is allowed

G 2

to

* Virg. Georg. l. 1. l. 299.

to the prose writer. It seems to have been so much the design of the first poets to give sensible images of things, that they would annex epithets to the commonest objects, even though they denoted but very inconsiderable circumstances. Hence γάλα λευκὸν *, γαῖα μέλαινα †, μώνυχες ἵπποι ‡, and the like. In Homer himself these epithets are in continual use. And his authority has obtained the sanction of the greatest critics for this practice. Quintilian says, that the poets make a more frequent, and less reserved use of epithets, than the writers or speakers in prose : for with the poets it is enough, says he, that the epithet agree with the word, to which it is annexed ; but in the orator, unless it have some distinct effect, it is thought superfluous ||. Aristotle also allows such epithets to be very proper in poetry **. Boileau has attempted to defend the ancient poets in the use of these trifling epithets, when applied to persons, by supposing them intended in lieu of a surname ††. But he seems to have forgot, that the like are applied to other things also.

And

* white milk.

† the black ground.

‡ horses with uncloven hoofs.

|| *Eo (ἐπιδέτω) poetæ et frequentius, et liberius utuntur: namque illis satis est convenire verbo, cui apponitur; et ita dentes albi, et humida vina in his non reprehenduntur: apud oratorem, nisi aliquid efficitur, redundat.*

** *ἐν μὲν γὰρ ποιήσει ὁρεπεῖ γάλα λευκὸν εἶπεν.*

†† *Il ne faut pas regarder ces épithètes, qu'il leur donne, comme de simples épithètes, mais comme des espèces de surnom, qui les font connoître. Reflex. sur Longin. Refl. 9.*

And it is evident, that Virgil has with judgment been sparing in every kind of these supernumerary epithets. It is certainly now expected, that epithets in poetry, as well as in prose, should be used with particular design. Notwithstanding which, we often meet in modern writers with such, as contribute little more than those before mentioned towards improving the representation of the thing, they are applied to, and pass upon us only by appearing more studied, and farther searched for. But to determine the just measure for the use of epithets in poetry, I think we may allow them never to be unseasonable, when they will at all contribute to the enlivening the picture, or any way making a more forcible impression upon the imagination. The poet's only care is to avoid being imposed on by sounding words, which have no meaning conducive to that effect.

HOWEVER though the primary intent of poetry is not inconsistent with plainness of style; yet as figurative expressions are useful both in that, and all other kinds of writing, let us now proceed to consider, how far the criterion, here delivered, for setting the bounds between poetry and prose will enable us to determine by what greater liberty in the use of such forms of speech the poet may distinguish himself from the prose author.

The general reason assigned by Aristotle for all deviations from the direct modes of speech is the

avoiding meanness, to which he observes, that the words in common use, which are the most appropriate names of things, are subject.

The expressions in ordinary discourse frequently labour under this defect, that they are too general, and represent the thoughts but imperfectly. They are also frequently incumbered with trifling redundancies. It is by avoiding such superfluities, and by a choice of words better appropriated to each idea, that the language of gentlemen is chiefly distinguished from that of the people in a lower condition of life. But besides these imperfections accompanying the most familiar forms of speech, which it is necessary for all writers to avoid; there is also another cause of dislike attending many of the common words and phrases. As some things cannot be named in express terms without the censure of indecency; so there are others, which under the circumstances, wherewith we ordinarily consider them, appear of so little account, that when we would raise a great idea from any uncommon circumstance of such objects, it is almost necessary by some artificial turn of expression to avoid their common appellation. I cannot illustrate this by a better example than from the poem before us. Hay and straw are such inconsiderable subjects; therefore the magazines of them in the camp of Xerxes are described by periphrasis, as follows:

There at his word devouring Vulcan feasts
On all the tribute, which Thessalia's meads

Yield

Yield to the scythe, and riots on the heaps
Of Ceres emptied of the ripen'd grain.

B. 9. v. 114.

This is a refinement, which seems to have arisen by time. In Homer we often find the commonest things expressed by their plain names. But when the first writers became ancient, and many of their words somewhat out of use; it being, as I suppose, observed, that under an unaccustomed name the disagreeable impression of the meanness of the image did not so strongly present itself, such less common words, and a more studied turn of phrase became in fashion upon these occasions. However this reservedness may easily be carried to excess, and degenerate into an effeminate delicacy, lay writers under unsurmountable difficulties in expressing their thoughts, and introduce into a language the greatest poverty, of which the most judicious of the French writers in particular complain*. However I do not find, but the author we are criticising is sufficiently circumspect in this particular.

This care to avoid low words is more necessary in the poet than in the prose writer. For by our

G 4

criterion

* *La (langue) Françoise est principalement capricieuse sur les mots.* Boil. Réflex. critiq. sur Longin. Réfl. 9.

Nôtre langue manque d'un grand nombre de mots et de phrases. Il me semble même qu'on l'a gâtée et appauvrie depuis environ cent ans, en voulant la purifier. Réflex. sur la Rhétorique et sur la Poétique par Mr. de Fenelon Archeveque et Duc de Cambray. §. 3.

criterion whatever contributes to weaken the image is a capital defect in poetry ; whereas the prose writer cannot without the charge of affectation appear to prefer any thing to the instructing the reader in his meaning.

BESIDES this use of artificial forms of speech they often give additional energy to the thought. These forms are usually divided into tropes and figures. Tropes vary the meaning of words by using them in a sense, to which they bear only some relation more or less distant from their original acceptation. In the use of these consists, what we now usually call a figurative style ; but the figures of the grammarians and rhetoricians do not change the proper signification of words, but only clothe the thought, or the words and sentences in some studied dress. All deviations of words, or of their construction from common usage are grammatical figures ; and every designed assemblage of words either according to some chosen rangement, or on account of any other relation between them is comprehended under the rhetorical figures of words ; whereas the other species of rhetorical figures, where some artificial turn is given to the thought, are called figures of the sentiment.

But my design is not to run over the numerous list of tropes and figures. I propose only to consider those, wherein the poet is most distinguished from the writer in prose.

ARISTOTLE

ARISTOTLE recommends to the poet for supporting the dignity of the style the use of different dialects, also the contracting, the lengthning out, and the compounding of words *. The three first are almost peculiar to the Greek language, which acquired those advantages from the number of independent states, in which it was spoke: for I apprehend the two latter to be scarce any thing more than a part of the first; if $\kappa\epsilon\tilde{\iota}$ had not in some place or other been used in the days of Homer, or not long before for $\kappa\epsilon\tilde{\iota}\theta\eta$, it is scarce to be imagined, that he would have been any more understood than an English poet, who should drop the latter syllable of the word barley. The only particular, which in our language bears any resemblance to this practice of the Greek writers, is the using ancient words, after they are begun to be discontinued in discourse. As most words are first introduced into a language in familiar conversation; so their use continues in writing and set discourses, when they begin to be left off in common: and as poetry is the most studied and laboured kind of writing, words may very properly be continued there the longest.

Farther a poet may pretty freely compound words in our language. Though this is a practice, which all languages do not equally admit of. Which difference arises from many such words being in
some

* Poët. c. 22.

some made use of in common discourse, in others not. This is most eminently evident in the Greek language; and our own is full of the like examples, such as day-light, sun-shine, book-seller, rent-gatherer, door-keeper, and numbers more: whereas the Latin language, and such of the modern, as have that tongue for their basis, are much less acquainted with such compositions excepting with the prepositions only. This method of compounding words has been very freely used by some of our poets; but of late more sparingly. (And Aristotle observes, that even in his language such compositions were best fitted for dithyrambics, the most rapturous and impetuous kind of ode *. Accordingly our poet has not very frequently used this composition of words, though some instances are not wanting, such are heaven-ascending, wood-inveloped, lone-wandering, and some others.

ANOTHER method proposed by Aristotle is the use of tropes †: of which the metaphor demands our principal regard, being more frequent than any other, as well in common discourse, as in all kinds of writing. Cicero observes, that the first use of metaphor seems to have been from necessity, when
words

* Τῶν δὲ ὀνομάτων τὰ μὲν διπλᾶ μάλιστα ἀρμόττει τοῖς διθυράμβοις. Poët. c. 22.

Χρησιμωτάτη ἡ διπλὴ λέξις τοῖς διθυράμβοις: ὅτι καὶ ποικίλας φασάσεις. Rhet. l. 3. c. 3.

† Poët. c. 22.

words directly appropriated to the thing spoke of were wanting*. The most obvious method to supply such defect is by making a comparison of the subject in hand with some other, in which a term is to be found expressive, of what in this other subject is analogous to that in the first, where the language was deficient. And to avoid tediousness it is most usual, when the similitude between the subjects is evident, to borrow such term without making the comparison in form. Mr. Locke takes notice, that most, if not all the words, whereby we express operations of the mind, were originally metaphors from sensible actions, such as apprehend, imagine, retain, and the like †.

But it frequently happens, where proper terms are not wanting, that such borrowed words are preferable, either that the subject, from whence those terms are taken, are more known, or are suited to make a greater impression upon our minds. By this means no artifice of speech is better fitted for avoiding, what is either mean or in any other way offensive.

Quintilian reduces metaphors under four heads ‡. Sometimes the terms proper to one animate action are transferred to another, as

Nor yet with falshood arms his fraudulent tongue.

Leon. B. 2. v. 273.

Another

* *Necessitas genuit, inopiâ coacta, et angustiis.* De Orator. l. 3. c. 38.

† Of human understanding. l. 3. ch. 1.

‡ Institut. orat. l. 8. c. 6.

Another species is the like allusion made between different inanimate things.

———their hands

Incircled wore a bracelet starr'd with gems.

Ibid. B. 3. v. 284.

A third is, when what is proper to living beings is expressed by what belongs to things without life.

———her charms

Divinely graceful shone upon her grief

Brightning the cloud of woe.

Ib. B. 1. v. 272.

The fourth is the reverse of this, when actions of life and sense are ascribed to inanimate beings. This last Quintilian observes to be the boldest, and also the sublimest form of this figure *. Of this kind are

———darkness flies,

And streams of light proclaim the chearful day.

B. 9. v. 139.

Night snatch'd her mantle from the ocean's breast.

Ibid. v. 107.

Before him terror strides, gigantic death

And desolation at his side attend

With all the furies of insatiate war.

Ib. v. 48.

It

* *Præcipueque ex his oritur mira sublimitas, quæ audaci, et proxime periculum translatione tolluntur, cum rebus sensu carentibus actum quendam et animos damus.*
Ibid.

It is manifest, no form of speech is more suited than the metaphor to the design of all poetry. For as this trope consists in a comparison of different subjects, by the means hereof the poet will never be at a loss to furnish upon every occasion such images or conceptions, as are suited to affect the imagination.

ARISTOTLE under the name of metaphor comprehends other tropes also *; concerning which we need not be particular.

But the hyperbole deserves to be consider'd distinctly. Quintilian calls it an ornament of the hardiest kind †. And an ancient treatise ‡ by no means of small account, whoever be the author of it, has animadverted upon this figure in much stronger terms, when he says the hyperbole is of all forms of speech the most frigid ||; having before given us Theophrastus's definition, of what is to be called frigid in style, namely whatever exceeds the expression suitable to the subject **. He brings
for

* Μεταφορὰ δ' ὅτιν ὀνόματι ἄλλοις ἐπιφορὰ, ἢ ἀπὸ γένους ὅτι εἶδος, ἢ ἀπὸ εἶδους ὅτι γένος, ἢ ἀπὸ εἶδους ὅτι εἶδος, ἢ κατὰ τὸ ἀνάλογον. Poët. c. 21.

† *Hyperbolen audacioris ornatus*, &c. Institut. Orat. l. 8. c. 6.

‡ Περὶ ἐρμηνείας bearing the name of Demetrius Phalereus.

|| Μάλιστα δὲ ἡ ὑπερβολὴ ψυχρότατον πάντων. §. 124.

** Ψυχρὸν ὅτι τὸ ὑπερβάλλον τὴν οἰκίαν ἀπαγγελίαν. §. 114.

for illustration a verse of Homer, where the horses of Rhesus are said to be whiter than snow, and equal in swiftneſs to the winds †. Againſt which Julius Scaliger through the warmth of his zeal for Virgil has taken care to match a line of his favourite poet, where the hyperbole is ſtill farther extended ‡.

This opinionated critic triumphs in like manner, that the ſwiftneſs of Ericthonius's horſes are exceeded by Camilla. They could run over ſtanding corn without breaking off the heads, but ſhe without touching it ||. Whereas this in Homer is rather to be conſidered as a fable, than as an hyperbole, ſince the north wind was their ſire. Nay though the line of Homer above mentioned, may ſerve the critic's purpoſe to explain his meaning; the poet has not uſed it improperly, ſince it was natural for Dolon, whoſe words they are, to magnify in an exorbitant manner the information, whereby he hoped to purchaſe his life.

Virgil

† Λευκότεροι χιόνι, δαίεν δ' ἀνέμοισιν ὅμοιοι.
Il. K. v. 437.

‡ Poëtic. l. 5. c. 3. *Qui candore nives anteirent,
curſibus auras.*

*In Iliade nivem ſuperant, ventos æquant, noſtri vero
utrobique præſtantes.*

|| Ibid. Ἀλεον ἐπ' ἀνθερίκων χερσὶν δέον, οὐδὲ κα-
τεκλων. Hom.

*Illa vel intactæ ſegetis per ſumma volaret
Gramina.* Virg.

Virgil frequently indulges himself in the use of this form of speech. In his first storm no less than four winds are brought together from all quarters of the heavens. This he has copied from the tempest in the *Odyssey* of Homer *, a work which Longinus does not scruple to charge with bearing the marks of old age : and though he mentions at the same time this storm, and some other passages with approbation ; yet he does not, I think, wholly exempt even them from that censure ; unless we can suppose, he had no objection against any part of the story of the Cyclops, which can scarce be imagined of so judicious a writer †. However there are some hurricanes, wherein the winds blow alternately from different points of the compass. But Virgil has enlarged upon his original. The united force of these winds drive the whole body of the sea from the lowest bottom ‡, and the waves are raised to the very stars ||. The motion of the sea between
Scylla

* Σὺν δ' Ἐυρὸς τε, Νοτὸς τ' ἔπειτα, Ζέφυρός τε Δυσπαῖς,
καὶ βορέης αἰθρηγέτης μέγα κύμα κυλίνδων.

Odysseus. E. v. 295.

† Λέγων δὲ ταῦτ' ἐκ ἐπλέλυσμαι τῷ ἐν τῇ Ὀδυσσεΐᾳ
χειμῶνων, καὶ τῷ περὶ τῆς Κύκλωπα, καὶ τίνων ἄλλων· ἀλλὰ
γῆρας διηγῆμαι, γῆρας δ' ὅμως Ὀμήρου. §. 2.

‡ *Incubere mari, totumque e sedibus imis*

*Una Eurusque, Notusque ruunt, creberque procellis
Africus.*

Æneid. l. i. v. 88.

|| *stridens Aquilone procella*

Velum adversa ferit, fluctusque ad sidera tollit.

Ibid. v. 106.

Scylla and Carybdis is still more magnified *. In like manner mount Ætna throws out volumes of flame, which brush the stars †.

It is not to be supposed, that such expressions, as these, are intended for a real representation of the thing alluded to, but are rather a mark of the writer's sinking under his own ideas, who for fear of coming short of his full conception resolves to exceed it. Accordingly Quintilian observes, that the genuine use of the hyperbole is, when the thing spoken of so exceeds the common measure or proportion, that words are wanting to express it in its just strength; that then it is allowable to say too much, as it is better the expression should exceed than fall short of the conception ‡. However the same Quintilian remarks, that there is no form of speech so apt to degenerate into affectation ||, the worst of all faults in writing **.

Lucan

* *Tollimur in cælum curvato gurgite, et iidem, Subducta, ad manes imos descendimus, unda.*

Ibid. l. 3. v. 564.

And

—rorantia vidimus astra. Ib. v. 567.

† *Attollitque globos flammæ, et sidera lambit.*

Ib. l. 3. v. 574.

‡ *Cum res ipsa, de qua loquendum est, naturalem modum excedit. Conceditur enim amplius dicere, quia dici, quantum est, non potest; meliusque ultra quam citra stat oratio.* Institut. Orat. l. 8. c. 6.

|| *Nec alia magis via in κακοζηλίαν itur.* Ibid.

** *Κακόζηλον vocatur quicquid est ultra virtutem, quoties ingenium iudicio caret, et specie boni fallitur; in eloquentia vitiorum pessimum.* Ib. c. 3.

Lucan has brought such winds together in a storm, that the sea hangs in doubt, to which it shall give way *. And while these are thus contending, who shall command, he presumes the opposite winds were not idle, lest the water should be blown quite away †. Its motion, it seems, would have equalled that of the universal deluge, unless Jupiter had kept down the waves by the clouds ‡. And the fate of the poor vessel in the midst of this supernatural hurricane is very concisely expressed. "The sails touch the clouds, and the keel the ground ||." This thought of mixing the water with the skies a poet of our own has extended to absolute burlesque, when he resembles whales, spouting out water, to fire-engines contrived by nature to be ready at hand for preventing any conflagration, to which the heavens might be exposed **.

This form of speech being an obvious means of supplying the defect of a more distinct representation,

* *Et dubium pendet, vento cui concidat, æquor.*

Pharsal. l. 5. v. 602.

† *Non Euri cessasse minas, non imbris atrum
Æolii jacuisse Notum sub carcere saxi
Crediderim; cunctosque solita de parte ruentes
Defendisse suas violento turbine terras;
Sic pelagus mansisse loco.*

Ibid. v. 608.

‡ *Ni superum rector pressisset nubibus undas.* Ib. v. 626.

|| *Nubila tanguntur velis, et terra carina.* Ib. v. 642.

** Like some prodigious water-engine made
To play on heav'n, if fire should heav'n invade.

Pr. Arth. B. 2. v. 173.

tion, of what is great, is frequently used in common discourse. Of writings, the sublime ode, and satyr admit of the boldest hyperboles; such exaggerations agreeing well with the impetuous warmth of that ode, and being also a very successful means of exposing follies, and exciting horror against vice, by representing either in their extremes. Comedy also, for exciting laughter, admits of the strongest expressions of this kind *.

INDEED to form an exact judgment of poetic diction, we ought to consider the several kinds of poetry apart; for each requires a very different manner of expression.

Comedy, now mentioned, being an imitation of human life is still reckoned a species of poetry, though through want of a sufficient variety of harmony in our language we have disengaged it from any poetic numbers. And if we apply our characteristic to this representation of common life, we shall find, that the only means, whereby the diction can contribute towards giving a more lively image of the objects presented to us, consists in the turn of the expression, as well as of the thought being accommodated to the character of each personage, so that nothing may be wanting towards a perfect resemblance. Thus in comedy the language receives its poetic air not by departing from the ordinary forms of speech, but by keeping more close to them than in any other kind of writing.

Tragedy,

* Περὶ Ἑρμηνείας, § 126.

Tragedy, which imitates persons of high condition in their most serious affairs, requires a more solemn style; yet Aristotle observes, that though the first writers of tragedy took great freedom in adorning their language, as this species of poetry became more improved, it at length had rejected all forms of speech incongruous to discourse*. Certainly nothing can well exceed the absurdity of those studied metaphors, formal sentences, and long similes, we often hear from the modern stage. This is to make the most offensive kind of affectation an ingredient in every character, by shewing them solicitous to be polished and refined in their discourse in the very midst of the dangers and distresses, with which they are supposed to be compassed.

In all kinds of this imitative poetry the imagination is more strongly affected in proportion as the imitation is more distinct, and compleat. In descriptive poetry the writer has sometimes another design, not so much to make an exact representation of the objects described, as to furnish collateral images and reflexions. This is the great artifice, whereby Virgil has adorned his Georgics, to compare continually, what befalls inanimate subjects with animal life, and the actions of brute animals with those of men †.

H 2

Of

* Rhetor. l. 3. c. 1.

† *Exuerint silvestrem animam, cultuque frequenti,
In quascunque voces artes, haud tarda sequuntur.*

Georg. l. 2. v. 51.

In furias ignemque ruunt; amor omnibus idem. &c.

Ibid. l. 3. v. 244.

Of all kinds of descriptive poetry the sublime ode requires the boldest diction; strength and a glaring brightness of expression being necessary to support this rapturous kind of verse.

In the descriptive part of epic poetry all attempts towards pomp of style ought so to be moderated, that the image be never rendered in any degree indistinct.

In this I think Homer never fails. The same distinctness of conception, whereby he was enabled to specify every character with the exactest propriety, accompanies him in all his descriptions: the shortest are like the sketches of a great master in painting, if the strokes are ever so few, they are notwithstanding the principal. But what sensible image can we form of the following description of thunderbolts forging under the hammers of the Cyclops?

*Tres imbris torti radios, tres nubis aquosæ
Addiderant, rutili tres ignis, et alitis Austri*.*

Æn. l. 8. v. 429.

The dialogue part of epic poetry demands a manner of expression still more chaste resembling that of tragedy, according to a most excellent precept of Aristotle, that the language ought most to be laboured in the unactive, that is the descriptive parts

* Three rays of writhen rain, of fire three more,
Of winged southern winds, and cloudy store
As many parts the dreadful mixture frame.

Dryden's transl. v. 572.

parts of the poem ; because too shining an expression obscures manners and sentiment *.

BUT in every kind of poetry studied expression is an art so very obvious, that great care should be taken to avoid excess, which will ever have the appearance of affectation. Cicero judiciously remarks, how soon this continual endeavour at adorning, and adding artificial graces becomes offensive. He says, the same effect is here produced as in the objects of sense, where those, which give the quickest relish, satiate the soonest. Nay that these colourings and artificial deckings in the orator or poet sooner become distasteful ; because here, not only the ear, but the judgment also receives offence from affected ornaments †. This caution to avoid the appearance of ostentation is so universally received among the most authentic critics, both ancient and modern, that it is almost proverbial, that the perfection of art consists in concealing it. The celebrated author of Telemachus has very strongly expressed this necessity of preserving a due simplicity in poetry in his discourse, to which we

H 3

have

* Τῇ δὲ λέξει δὲ διαπονεῖν ἐν τοῖς ἀρχαῖς μέρεσι, καὶ μὴτε ἡθικοῖς, μὴτε διανοητικοῖς ἀποκρύπτει γὰρ πάλιν ἡ λίαν λαμπρὰ λέξις τὰ ἥδη, καὶ τὸς διανοίας. Poët. c. 24.

† *Atque eo citius in oratoris aut in poetæ cincinnis ac fuco offenditur, quod sensus in nimia voluptate natura, non mente satiantur ; in scriptis et in dictis, non aurium solum, sed animi judicio etiam magis infucata vitia noscuntur.* De Orator. l. 3. c. 25.

have above had an occasion to refer *. In particular he says, a poet should write entirely for the benefit of his readers without any appearance of setting off himself. To make a work truly excellent it is necessary, that the author should so forget himself, that the reader may forget him likewise, and have his attention engaged only on the subject †.

NO poet is so free from all kind of ostentation, and comes up so fully to this character as Homer. But to conclude, the sum of what has here been said amounts to this, that the perfection even of a figurative style consists in its being free from any luxuriant and ostentatious pomp of words, or any affectation of pleasing the ear unconnected with the principal office of speech, which is to convey our ideas with ease, clearness and force. How far the diction of the author, we have taken under examination, comes up to this character may in some measure be judged of by the following passages.

As o'er the western waves, when ev'ry storm
Is hush'd within its cavern, and a breeze
Soft-breathing lightly with its wings along

The

* Réflex. sur la rhétorique et sur la poétique.

† Je demande un poète aimable, proportionné au commun des hommes, qui fasse tout pour eux, et rien pour lui. — Afin qu'un ouvrage soit véritablement beau, il faut que l'Auteur s'y oublie, et me permette de l'oublier. §. 5.

The slacken'd cordage glides, the sailor's ear
Perceives no sound throughout the vast expanse;
None, but the murmurs of the sliding prow,
Which slowly parts the smooth and yielding main.

B. 1. v. 89.

As in some torrid region, where the head
Of Ceres bends beneath its golden load,
If on the parching ground a fatal spark
Fall from a burning brand; the sudden blaze
Increas'd and aided by tumultuous winds
In rapid torrents of involving flames
Sweeps o'er the crackling plain, and mounting
high

In ruddy spires illumines half the skies.

B. 2. v. 167.

—like the vast Atlantic, when no shore,
No rock or promontory stops the sight
Unbounded, as it wanders; but the moon,
Resplendent eye of night, in fullest orb
Throughout th' interminated surface throws
Its rays abroad, and decks in snowy light
The dancing billows.

B. 2. v. 239.

—when the song of Thracian Orpheus drew
To Hebrus' margin from their dreary seats
The savage race, which Hæmus wrapt in clouds,
Pangæus cold, and Rhodopeian snows
In blood and discord nurs'd; the soothing strain
Flow'd with enchantment through their ravish'd
ears:

Their fierceness melted, and amaz'd they learn'd

The sacred laws of justice, which the bard
Mixt with the music of his heav'nly string.

B. 4. v. 352.

—— One first appear'd

In servile garb attir'd ; but near his side
A woman graceful and majestic stood ;
Not with an aspect rivalling the pow'r
Of fatal Helen, or the wanton charms
Of Love's soft queen ; but such as far excell'd,
Whate'er the lilly blending with the rose
Paints on the cheek of beauty soon to fade ;
Such as express'd a mind, which wisdom rul'd,
And sweetness temper'd, virtue's purest light
Illumining the countenance divine,
Yet could not sooth remorseless fate, nor teach
Malignant fortune to revere the good,
Which oft with anguish rends the spotless heart,
And oft associates wisdom with despair.

B. 6. v. 32.

—— To the hostile camp

With steps compos'd and silent down the pass
The phalanx moves. Each patient bosom hush'd
Its struggling spirit, nor in whispers breath'd
The rapt'rous ardour, virtue then inspir'd ;
But all await the moment doom'd to give
The Barb'rous millions to their deathful steel:
So lowring clouds expanding from the north
Awhile suspend their horrors, destin'd soon
To blaze in lightnings, and to burst in storms.

B. 8. l. 414.

As

As in some fruitful clime, which late hath known
The rage of winds and floods, when now the storm
Is heard no longer, and the deluge fled,
Still o'er the wasted region nature mourns
In melancholy silence; through the grove
With prostrate glories lie the stately oak
And elm uprooted, while the plains are spread
With fragments swept from villages o'erthrown,
And round the pastures flocks and herds are cast
In weltring heaps of death,

B. 9. v. 288.

As, by th' excelling architect dispos'd
To shield some haven, a stupendous mole
Fram'd of the grove and quarry's mingled strength
In ocean's bosom penetrates afar;
There stands the pride of art against the weight
Of seas, unmov'd, and breaks the whelming
furge.

Ibid. v. 326.

SECTION

SECTION VI.

Of versification.

WHAT has made many too fond of high figures, founding epithets, and laboured constructions, I imagine, is their not being duly apprized of the power of numbers; whereas a just and harmonious measure of verse will give sufficient grace or dignity to the most unaffected diction.

It must be confessed, that all the modern languages fall infinitely short of the ancient in this point. Both the Greek and Latin tongues, even in discourse, assigned for the pronunciation of each syllable an exact measure of time, in some longer and in some shorter, and so variously intermixt those two different measures in the same word, as furnished means for that variety of versification, to which we are altogether strangers. These measures were of such efficacy in those languages, that the adjusting their periods to some agreeable rhythmus, or movement by an apt succession of long and short syllables was considered in oratory, as an art of great importance towards the perfection of eloquence. In our language this seems to be scarce thought of; though, perhaps, what we commonly call smoothness of style is in part owing to something analagous, namely such a rangement of the words, whereby the syllables follow one another with a
free

free and easy cadence. But in relation to the ancient verse, as we find some of their measures very harmonious to our ear; so there are others, which appear in reciting lame and defective. Of the first kind are the iambic, trochaic, dactylic, anapaestic, and some other measures; of the latter are the generality of their odes. This difference does not arise merely from the imperfect manner, wherewith we may be supposed to pronounce those languages; for Cicero has said the same, that the greatest part of the Lyric verse, when it is not sung, is scarce distinguishable from prose*. Indeed the cause of this difference is very evident. In speech the simple proportion of two to one is most natural to be observed between the length of the longer and shorter syllables. And those measures, which appear harmonious in reading, are divisible according to this proportion either into common or treble time, as tunes are divided in the modern music; the dactylic and anapaestic measures move in common time, the iambic and trochaic according to the treble: the other measures are not divisible in that manner. And if we inquire, how these movements, irregular in reading, could be fitted to music; we shall find one of these two means

* *Esse in oratione numerum quendam non est difficile cognoscere, &c. Sed in versibus res est apertior: quanquam etiam a modis quibusdam, cantu remoto, soluta esse videatur oratio; maximeque id in optimo quoque eorum poetarum, qui ἀεικλοί a Græcis nominantur, quos, cum cantu spoliaveris, nuda pæne remanet oratio. Orator, c. 55.*

means necessary for that purpose, either by interposing rests or pauses to supply the measure, where deficient, or by taking some liberty with the syllables, so as upon occasion to vary the common proportion between the longer and the shorter. Saint Austin has written a treatise expressly to reconcile the various measures of the ancient verse with the principles of music; and whenever any verses are composed of feet consisting of different measures of time, he endeavours to fill up the incomplete measures by the assistance of pauses only*.

To render the Sapphic verse more agreeable to our ear we usually corrupt it toward a dactylic measure, and read it too nearly after this manner,

Ĵām ſatis terrīs nivīs atque dīræ †.

Salinas, an early author among the modern writers upon music, gives us both a Spanish and an Italian tune composed upon this movement, and observes that the ecclesiastics were accustomed to sing sapphic hymns to the same ‖.

This verse Saint Austin divides into feet thus,

Ĵām ſatis terrīs nivīs atque dīræ †,

where the first foot contains but five measures of time, whereas the rest are six complet. This deficiency he supplies by placing a pause equal to one measure of time after the first foot. And his method agrees very well with this particular verse, and the whole stanza to which it belongs, could
the

* In lib. de Mus. l. 3. c. 8. † Horat. Carmin. l. 1. od. 2. ‖ In lib. de Mus. l. 6. c. 19. ‡ In lib. de Mus. l. 4. c. 13, 14.

the rangement of notes in the last foot, be allowed upon the principles of music in such a movement, as this. But according to a limitation, he himself lays down, and is certainly agreeable to common sense, that the pause must necessarily be placed after the end of a word *, this method of reducing the Sapphic verse to an harmonious movement is insufficient. For in this verse it is no way necessary that the word terminate always in this particular place. This is evident by the following lines of the same ode,

Et superjecto pavidæ natarunt.

Also *Littore Etrusco violenter undis.*

Ire dejectum monumenta regis.

Salinas proposes to divide this verse into a movement proportioned out by five measures of time †. But as this is a division wholly unknown to the modern music, and I think scarce consistent with musical rythmus; so it labours under the same defect of requiring rests, which often fall in the middle of words. According to him the movement is thus divided,

Jam satis terris nivis atque diræ.

a rest being supposed after the second foot, or bar according to the present language of music, and another at the end. But in this line

O

* l. 4. c. 14. *Sileri autem oportet non nisi ubi terminatur pars orationis.*

† l. 6. c. 19.

Ὁ *Vēnus*, *regina Cnidi*, *Paphique* *

the first of these rests divides a word; and so also will the latter, whenever the verse ends in the middle of a word, of which we have some few instances in this kind of verse.

The Sapphic verse admits of some variety in its numbers; for though the fourth syllable of this verse is usually long, yet Hephæstion observes, that it is sometimes short †. And Salinas endeavours to reduce this latter form of the verse also to music, but with as little success as in the other ‡.

Perhaps it is not possible to divide this kind of verse into a regular movement without the other method above proposed of giving additional length to some of the long syllables. And that such liberty in varying the length of the syllables was taken by the ancients in accommodating their verse to music seems nearly to be certain, from what Aristides Quintilianus informs us, that in music they made use of four different measures of time, namely not only double but treble and quadruple also of the shortest ||.

Of this, I think, there could be no pretence to doubt, did not this author talk nonsense afterwards, when

* Hor. Carmin. l. 1. od. 30.

† Περὶ Μέτρων. c. πρὶ τ' καὶ ἀπαύειν μίξεως.
‡ l. 6. c. 19.

|| Περὶ Μουσικῆς l. 1. p. 33. σύνθετον δὲ ἔστι χερόν
ὁ διαιρείον, δύναμιον· τέκτων δὲ ὁ μὲν διπλασίον ἔστι τοῦ
πρώτου, ὁ δὲ τετραπλάσιον, ὁ δὲ τετραπλάσιον· μέγας γὰρ
τετραπλάσιον προσλαμβάνει ὁ ῥυθμικὸς χερόν.

when he endeavours to make out four measures of time in verse also, by supposing that as the long vowel is twice the measure of the short one, so a short vowel should be considered as of twice the length of a consonant; for this notable reason, that any short vowel joined to another makes it long, as much as when two consonants follow it; whereas a consonant having no sound of itself, cannot with the least propriety have any measure of time ascribed to it *. But this writer is apt to amuse himself with fanciful resemblances; and having first imagined I know not what analogy between these four measures of time, and the four dieses, into which a tone was considered as divisible, he must needs try at making out the like in relation to words.

SALINAS indeed † proposes still another regulation of sapphics by four measures of time, which requires a rest at the beginning of each verse, and at the fifth syllable also, as in his first method: though every such scheme is insufficient; for in Sappho's own verses this syllable falls very frequently in the middle of a word. But a particular examination of the ode measures is foreign to our present design: and it is extreme difficult, if not now impossible to determine with much certainty in relation to the tunes of the ancient odes.

All verse intended for rehearsal consists of those species of measures, which are directly divisible
into

* Ibid. p. 45.

† l. 5. c. 19.

Ō Venus, regina Cnidi, Paphique *

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Of this, I think, there could be no pretence to doubt, did not this author talk nonsense afterwards, when

* Hor. Carmin. l. 1. od. 30.

† Περὶ Μέτρων. c. *οὐδ' ἔτι καὶ ἀπ' αὐθιγίου μίξεως.*

† 1. 6. c. 19.

|| Περὶ Μυστικῆς l. i. p. 33. σύνθεσις δὲ ἔστι χερόν
ὁ διακρίνει, συνάμμιον· τέτων δὲ ὁ μὲν διπλασίαν ἔστι τοῦ
πρώτου, ὁ δὲ τετραπλασίον, ὁ δὲ πενταπλασίον· μέχει μὲν
τετραπλῆς πρὸς τὸν ῥυθμικὸς χερόν.

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All verse intended for rehearsal consists of those species of measures, which are directly divisible
into

* Ibid. p. 45.

† l. 5. c. 19.

into a musical movement. The most common of these are the iambic, trochaic, dactylic and anapaestic before mentioned, each of which receives its name from the feet, whereby it is constituted. A short syllable succeeded by a long one is called an iambic foot, a long syllable succeeded by a short one makes the trochaic foot, a long syllable preceeding two short ones a dactyl, and two short ones before a long syllable an anapaest. A number of any one of these feet joined together compose a verse of the same denomination.

However these verses are not so absolutely confined to their original feet, as to exclude all others. The two short syllables both in the dactylic and anapaestic measures are frequently united into a long one: in the iambic and trochaic measures the long syllable is often divided into two short, besides other variations to be mentioned hereafter.

We learn from Aristotle, that the most ancient of these measures were the dactylic and iambic; that form of the dactylic, called hexameter from its consisting of six feet of that measure*, being assigned for the graver kind of narrative poetry, and

* This verse is usually spoke of as containing six complete feet, the last of which must necessarily consist of two long syllables. Hephæstion and some others define it more concisely to be a dactylic measure of six feet, but catalectic, or deficient by a syllable; and when the last syllable is a long one, it is admitted by this general rule, that it is indifferent what kind of syllable terminates a verse.

and the iambic for pieces of ridicule and satyr *. The Margites seen by Hephæstion contained a mixture of both †. From these the other two species are plainly derived ‡. By taking away the first syllable from an iambic verse is made the trochaic. The dactylic measure by removing the first syllable becomes a complete anapæst, and by taking away a syllable more that form of verse very frequent in our songs, which consists of anapæstic feet, but begins defectively with an iambic, which by Hephæstion is also reckon'd under the head of the anapæst ||.

From each of these measures was derived a great variety of verse according to the different number of feet join'd together, even from two feet as far at least as eight, besides others intermediate by terminating the verse in the part of a foot.

THOUGH the anapæstic foot contain the same number of measures with the dactyl, and the trochaic the same with the iambic; yet the anapæst is never used in dactylic measures, except in a very few instances at the beginning of the verse, nor are trochaics mixt with iambics. The reason for this is to be taken from the principles of music. As our
music

* ἐγένοντο τῶν παλαιῶν, οἱ μὲν ἡρωϊκῶν, οἱ δὲ ἰαμβικῶν ποιηταί. κ. λ. Poët. c. 4.

† Hephæst. πρὸ ποιήματ.

‡ Vid. Schol. in Hephæst. § πρὸ τῆς ἀναπαιστικῆς μέτρης. Item Salin. l. 7. c. 19.

|| § πρὸ τῆς ἀναπαισ. μέτρης.

music is divided into bars containing equal measures of time ; so in playing or singing the equality between those measures is preserved by marking them out with some regular motion, usually by elevating and depressing the hand or foot. This is, what was anciently called *arsis* and *thesis*, and at present beating of time. This motion is also accompanied with some degree of emphasis, or augmentation of sound in the note, which is beat upon. Now, as in reading, a long syllable is the fittest to receive such emphasis, this must fall in the iambic and anapæstic foot on the latter part, but in the trochaic and dactylic on the former part of the foot. Therefore the mixture of the anapæst with the dactylic, or of the trochaic with the iambic would disturb the equality of the movement*.

THOUGH

* If I might be allowed to pass the least censure on those two most excellent pieces of Milton, *L' Allegro* and *Il Penseroso* ; I could not but consider the uncertain mixture of iambic and trochaic verses, as a blemish in those poems.

This account of the ancient *arsis* and *thesis* agrees with Aristides, who says [p. 31.] Ἄρσις μὲν ὅτι ποδὸς ἀνάμειψις ἐν τῷ ἀνω, θέσις δὲ ὅτι τὸ κατωτέρω μέγεθος ἄρσις is the raising up some part of the body, and *thesis* is moving the same down. Again [p. 36, 37.] he says, the dactylic and trochaic foot begin with *thesis*, and end with *arsis* ; but the anapæst and iambic begin with *arsis* and end with *thesis* ; describing these feet thus : Ἀ. ἀπὸς ἀπὸ πρῶτον [δ' ἀκτύχ.] ἐν μακρῇ θέσει, καὶ δύο βραχυῶν ἄρσιων. ἰ. ἀπὸς ἀπ' ἐλαττοῦ ἐν δύο βραχυῶν ἄρσιων, καὶ μακρῇ θέσει. — iam.

THE dactylic and iambic took place in the poems designed for rehearsal of all the other measures, which consist of an uninterrupted movement; in-
somuch that the iambic succeeded the trochaic even in tragedy, as soon as that species of poetry received its last form, and became an imitation of discourse*. But all these measures were frequently used in songs. And there are some differences necessary to be observed even in the dactylic and iambic measures, when they are designed to be accompanied with music, and when intended for reading or simple recital.

It is known to every one, that in hexameter verses, when the words divide with the feet, the movement appears so different from the common form of those verses, that such verses are expressly avoided in all narrative poems. For instance, how different does this verse,

Clío dic mihi quinam primus fingere versūs,

found from this line of Virgil

I 2

Tantæ

Ἐξ ἡμιστίας ἀρσῆος καὶ διπλατίης θέσεως. τετραῖς
ἐκ διπλατίης θέσεως καὶ βραχέας ἀρσῆος. As at this day
we compose tunes to these measures by this rule; so
I think this writer to be here of greater authority than
the Grammarians, who differ from him; because he is
not only a writer on music, the subject, to which this
point properly belongs; but there is also strong pre-
sumption of his being much more ancient.

* Τὸ μὲν γὰρ πρῶτον τετραμέτρῳ ἐχρῶντο διὰ τὸ σα-
πυεικλὺ καὶ ὀρχησικῶδες εἶναι τὴν πείνην· λέξεως δὲ
ῥυθμικῆς, αὐτῇ ἢ φύσιν τὸ οἰκεῖον μέτρον εὔρε, μάλιστα
γὰρ λεκτικὸν τῶν μέτρων τὸ ἰαμβεῖον ἐστίν. Aristot. poet. c. 4.

^u - ^l - ^u ^u ^l - ^l - ^l - ^u ^u ^l - ^u
Tantæ molis erat Romanam condere gentem

though the measure in both is syllable for syllable the same*. Notwithstanding this remarkable difference, if both were set to music, they would accompany the same movement: and though such verses, when read among others, sound very disagreeably, yet they are not destitute of musical proportion. In the Trachyniæ of Sophocles we find a small number of hexameter verses to be accompanied with music, the first of which consists of the like disjointed measure.

^u ^l - ^u ^u ^l - ^l - ^l - ^u ^u ^l - ^u
^u ^l - ^u ^u ^l - ^l - ^l - ^u ^u ^l - ^u

v. 1027.

Saint Austin is, I think, the only writer, who endeavours to account for this difference by a distinction, he attempts to make between metre and verse. But to discover the true reason hereof, I apprehend we must have recourse to this principle, that verse, when designed for recital, ought to be considered as a medium between prose and song. The forementioned Aristides has this observation upon the different use of the human voice, that in common speech it moves with a smooth tenor, being varied by insensible degrees; but in singing it passes from sound to sound by distinct and sensible intervals. The same is also made by several of

* These verses are called by Diomedes, the grammarian, (l. 3.) *partipedes*, and by Maximus Victorinus (*in libro de Carminibus heroico*) *dispositi*.

of the other writers on music; but Aristides adds, that the recital of verses is a kind of medium between these *. And to the same purpose Quintilian remarks, that though a poem should not be read with the tone of one that sings; yet on the other hand it ought to be distinguished by the conduct of the voice from prose †. And what these authors observe of the tone of voice, is equally to be regarded in relation to the movement; that as verse is distinguished from prose by disposing the words in a musical measure, so it is to be removed from the express form of music by causing the words sometimes to terminate in the middle of the feet, in order that the little pauses between the words may in a proper degree break the formality of the measure. And that this is the true reason, why the words are made in this manner to divide the feet, I think is from hence evident, that this is not with such constancy practised in the measures appropriated to music. In the anapæstic measures the words and feet frequently terminate together. For instance

Δόγος ἐκ Δαναῶν κακοθροῦς ὄντις ἦ.

Soph. Aj. v. 138.

So likewise

I 3

*H

* Lib. i. p. 7.

† Sit lectio virilis, et cum suavitate quadam gravis: et non quidem prosæ similis, quia carmen est, et se poëta canere testantur; non tamen in canticum dissoluta, nec plasmate effæminata. Institut. Orat. l. i, c. 3.

Ἡ γῆς ἀεστῆς ῥήξας δάπνδον, καὶ τὸν ἀνὴρ δι-
 εἰπάτω ; Aristoph. Plut. v. 515.

This division of the feet by the words ending in the middle of them is usually called *cæsure*: though every terminating of the words with some designed relation to the feet is called *cæsure* or *incision* by ancient grammarians. In the heroic verse either the third foot is to be divided after the first syllable, as

Tantæ molis erat Romanam condere gentem.

Æn. l. i. v. 37.

or after the second, if it be a dactyl, as

οὐλομένῃ, ἢ μὲν ἰ' Ἀχαιοῖς ἄλγε' ἔθηκε; II. A. v. 2.

or else the fourth foot after the first syllable, as

Inde toro pater Æneas | sic orsus ab alto.

Æn. l. 2. v. 3.

Frequently this verse divides in more than one of these places.

Turne, quod optanti | divûm | promittere nemo

Auderet,volvenda | dies | en attulit ultro.

Æn. l. 9. v. 6, 7.

In the dramatic iambs also the third or fourth foot is usually divided by a cæsure, and often both.

Ἀκτὴν μὲν ἡδε | τῆς περιρρύτου χθονὸς

Λήμνη, βροτοῖς ἄσειπτος, | οὐδ' οἰκυμάρη·

¹⁰ Ἐνθ' ὧ κρηγίσι· πατρὸς ἑλλήνων τραφεῖς.

Sophocl. Philoct. v. 1, 2, 3.

BESIDES this cæsure, which depends upon the termination of the words only, there is another division of the verse, which the construction of the sentences

sentences will generally occasion, especially in verses of length; and Dionysius of Halicarnassus observes expressly, that as a rangement of words as much in measure, as the freedom of that kind of writing would admit, is the perfection of prose; so on the other hand the poets chose to break the formality of their numbers, as much as possible, by varying these divisions, and by uniting the verses in continuing the sentence from one to another*. To this the great Milton has particularly attended†.

THE writers in iambics used still another artifice to reduce their numbers towards prose not practised in hexameters. This was often to lengthen the time beyond the regular movement of the verse, by introducing instead of the short syllable either a long one or two short, both in the first, third, and fifth foot of their verse. Nay sometimes they would put two short syllables for one in other places also; but this was chiefly done by the comic poets‡. The Latin comedians took still farther liberties; in so much that Cicero has said of them, that in bringing down their verse to an imitation of discourse, they often sunk it into very prose itself||.

I 4

By

* *De compositione.* §. 26.

† See Preface to *Paradise lost*.

‡ Hephæst. *Ὡς ἰαμβικὸν μέτρον.*

|| *Comicorum senarii propter similitudinem sermonis sic sæpe sunt abjecti, ut nonnunquam vix in his numerus, et versus intelligi possit.* Orator, c. 55.

In the dramatic writers the trochaics followed the iambics through all these irregularities.

By reducing the two short syllables of the dactylic foot in hexameter verses into one long one, which might be done in any part of the verse, though not so frequently practised in the fifth foot; and by the like change of the feet in iambic verses, together with the other liberties now mentioned; also by varying, as much as might be, the caesures of the feet, and the relation of the parts of the verse to the members of the sentence, the poets have been careful to give that variety to the movement and cadence of their verse, which is necessary, especially in works of any length, to avoid fatiguing the ear by the constant repetition of the same uniform measure.

SAINT Austin * gives a much more limited idea of verse, than what we have here exhibited. He asserts, that the characteristic, whereby it is distinguished from simple metre, consists in its being necessarily divided into two parts, and that the words at least ought always so to terminate, that every verse of the same kind may divide in the same place. For example, that all hexameter verses should be divisible at the first syllable after the second foot, as in the first line of the *Æneid*,

Arma virumque cano | Trojæ qui primus ab oris.

In this he follows Varro, whom we learn from Aulus Gellius to have asserted the same thing †.

Saint

* De music. l. 5. c. 2.

† Noct. Attic. l. 18. c. ult.

Saint Austin will but just allow, that the poets venture now and then to insert a line not so divisible, and disparages all such lines with the name of simple metres, notwithstanding that in Homer lines incapable of this division occur no less frequently than those, to which alone he would ascribe the name of verse *.

Certainly a perpetual division of a number of verses of any kind at one constant place, if we there make any real pause in reading, will in effect reduce each to two †.

It is upon this imaginary necessity of dividing the verse always in the same place, that Saint Austin builds his whole system concerning the distinction between verse and plain metre. On this principle he scans each member of the verse by itself, and insists, that hexameter verses, and the trimeter or dramatic iambics also, be considered as beginning

* De music. l. 5. c. 3.

† For example the ancient tetrameters, whether iambic or trochaic, which divide after the fourth foot, have each so much the air of two, that in the imitations of that measure in our language we usually write each verse in two several lines.

Ω πολλά δὴ τὰς δεσπότη | τὰν τὸν δύμον φάροντες,

Aristoph. Plut. v. 253.

The last time I came o'er the moor,

I left my love behind me.

Ω πάτερς Θήκης ἐνοικοι, | λεύαετ', οἷδ' πρὸς ὅδε,

Sophocl. Oedip. tyran. v. 1545.

Fairest isle, all isles excelling,

Seat of pleasures, and of loves;

beginning with a part only of a foot, and by neglecting the first syllable that the hexameters be scanned by anapæsts, and the iambics by trochaic feet *; though it is manifest, that Horace considered dramatic verses, as consisting of iambic feet †.

Saint Austin labours much in search after a reason in nature for the division, he assigns, as necessary to verse; but what he advances for this purpose, is too absurd and ridiculous to be here enlarged upon †.

THE

* Ibid. c. 5.

† Art. poët. v. 251.

‡ His scheme is to find something to be called an equality in the unequal division of the verse.

If a verse of any kind consist of such an odd number of half feet, suppose seven, that the number being divided as near, as may be, in the middle, the greater half will be even: then, because each of the parts will be made up of an equal repetition of the number two, excepting that in the odd part there will at last remain only an unit to answer the last two of the other part; the equality, which seems here to be lost, is to be restored by considering, that every number is one number, and that unit multiplied by any number produces only the multiplier; therefore unit may be allowed to supply the place of any other number.

If the odd number of half feet be of the other kind, suppose nine, where the major half is odd, such measures are metres, and not verse; because their two parts cannot be reduced to equality by this means.

If the number of half feet is even, suppose eight, and is divided according to his rule, as near as may be, in the middle so, as to avoid a real equality, that is, in
this

THE next thing to be considered in relation to the different kinds of verse is their respective lengths. Metre and verse differ from simple rhythm in this, that rhythm in speech is every orderly succession of long and short syllables, which will pass agreeably over the ear; but metre and verse is such rhythm confined within a short compass, and successively repeated. In like manner verses differ from one another, not only by the diversity of their movement, but also as they are longer or shorter. We find short verses best fitted for song. Thus amongst the ancient odes very frequent use is made both of trochaic and iambic verses, but seldom of any exceeding the number of four feet. Such, as consist of more feet, are very uncommon.

this example into five and three; here two and three composing the first part, and two and one the second, the fancied equality is recovered because of the relation, in which unit stands to the number three in common with that, it was shewn to bear to all numbers whatever.

The like trick would have accounted for the division of hexameters and trimeters consisting of twelve half feet into five and seven; but these are dignified with a more subtle speculation; for having divided the number seven into four and three according to his former conceit of equality, he then finds his desired equality in these verses, because the number four taken four times makes sixteen, and the number three taken three times makes nine, which two numbers together amount to twenty five equal to five times five. De music. l. 5. c. 7, &c.

uncommon. The iambics consisting of six feet were chosen by dramatic writers for the discursive part of their works, as making a considerable advance towards prose. This, I think, furnishes a reason, why the iambic measure of five feet (which is the verse of our narrative poetry) is the fittest for that purpose of any measure hitherto used with success in our language. This verse was not wholly in disuse amongst the ancients. It bears the name of Alcman, the first Lyric poet*, whose works are lost; but we find also some very few instances of the same verse in Pindar †, and even of the verse with an additional syllable called *versus Hipponactius* ‡. Since therefore we are to consider verse for recital, as a medium between song and prose discourse, this verse, longer than those commonly used in song, yet not so long, as those of six feet, which were intended to bear a great degree of affinity with prose, is the properest measure for that kind of poetry. The ancients indeed do not appear to have used this verse for that purpose, the six feet of the dactylic measure composing a
more

* Vid. Serv. de cent. metris.

† $\begin{array}{ccccccc} \cup & - & \cup & \cup & \cup & - & \cup \\ \text{Ξενοισι δὲ διερχόμεντα γνώσμαι} \end{array}$
 $\begin{array}{ccccccc} - & - & \cup & - & \cup & - & \cup \\ \text{Τῶν ὀλβίων Κόρινθον Ἰθμίς} \end{array}$ } Ol. 13. 599. 1.

$\begin{array}{ccccccc} \cup & - & \cup & - & \cup & - & \cup \\ \text{Ἀσῶν δ' ὡς τῶν δ' ἀπλομαί φερων.} \end{array}$ Nem. 8. 5 ποδ.
v. 6.

‡ $\begin{array}{ccccccc} - & - & \cup & - & \cup & \cup & \cup \\ \text{Κάλισον αἰ μεγαλοπολιες Ἀθῆναι.} \end{array}$ Pyth. 7. 599. 1.

more sonorous verse, and sufficiently removed from prose to answer the same intention.

THE measures or rhythmus of our verse has not been so much considered by writers on this subject, as it ought to have been; though Dr. Wallis in his Grammar of the English language has expressly proved, that we make use both of iambic and trochaic verses*. And these lines are an example both of the dactylic, and of each species of the anapaestic measures above mentioned†.

Once on a time, as old stories rehearse,
A friar would needs shew his talent in Latin;
But was forely put to't in the midst of a verse,
Because he could find no word to come pat in.

What has caused our measures to be so little attended to, I suppose, is the uncertainty in the quantity of the greatest part of our syllables. This must ever frustrate all attempts to introduce the ancient hexameters into our narrative poetry; for that verse being composed of a discretionary mixture of two different feet, we seldom can be led by the sound of the words into the true movement of each verse. However all our syllables are not promiscuous. Trissino, a famous Italian poet, and an
early

* Cap. 15.

† pag. 113.

early writer on the measures of their verse, lays down this rule; that as the ancient feet were determined by the quantity of the syllables only, in his language they are determined by the accent*. This is equally true in our tongue, and for this reason, that whereas the ancient accent is represented to be only a variation in the tone of the voice, and had no relation to the quantity of the syllable, ours is constantly attended with an emphasis, which implies greater length in the syllable. Hereof our songs are a proof; for whenever in the tune a long note, or an equivalent number of short ones are not set to the syllables, whereon the emphasis or accent is laid in reading, the movement of the tune appears evidently to differ from that of the verse. But however, as each single word has but one accent, if no syllable were admitted into verse in the place of a long one, but what was accented in prose, all polysyllable words would be excluded from the greatest part of our verse. Therefore most other syllables are used as common, and in verse are read upon occasion with some degree of emphasis, whereby they receive the power of long ones. Though all our syllables do not well admit such lengthening out: several of our monosyllable particles, except in

* sì come i Greci, et i Latini formavano i loro piedi di sillabe brevi e lunghe, così noi gli formiamo di gravi et acute; e come essi facevano, che 'l Jambo avesse la prima breve, e la seconda lunga, così noi facemo che 'l Jambo abbia la prima grave e la seconda acuta, &c. Poëtic. division. 2. § De i piedi.

in some particular situations, cannot supply the office of long syllables.

WHEN the Latin and Greek languages became degenerate, the usage of observing the quantities of the several syllables was neglected in discourse, and the accent began to govern their verse. It is evident from St. Austin's treatise so often mentioned, that in his time, at least where he lived, the quantities of the syllables might be unknown to those, who spoke the language. And Maximus Victorinus speaks of verses commonly writ in his time, in which the just quantities of the syllables were disregarded; the verses being regulated by the ear upon principles so different, that whenever they ran in true measure, it was the effect of chance, not of design; nay his words imply this regulation to have been by the accent*. Our countryman, the venerable Bede, has writ a piece on the measures of verse†, in which, after copying, as it were, the words of Victorinus, he illustrates them by this example,

* *Metrum poeticum est versificandi disciplina, certa syllabarum ac temporum ratione in pedibus observata. — cui rhythmus est consimilis, qui sic definitur. Est verborum modulatio et compositio, non metrica ratione, sed numeri sanctione ad judicium aurium examinata; veluti sunt cantica poetarum vulgarium. — Plerumque tamen casu quodam invenias etiam rationem metricam in rhythmico, non artificii ratione observata, sed tono et ipsa modulatione ducente. De Carmin. heroic. in princip.*

† De metrica ratione.

ample, which, he says, is formed upon the model of the iambic measure

*Rex æterne, domine,
Rerum creator omnium,
Qui eras ante sæcula,
Semper cum patre filius.*

Here the just quantity of the syllables is departed from in every line, but the second. In all the rest long syllables are found where the iambic measure indispensibly requires short ones; and in the first and third verses, besides their being deficient by a syllable, short syllables, but accented, supply the place of long ones.

These verses in relation to the accent resemble in every circumstance verses of this length composed in our own language: for as the accent falls not on the second, but the first syllable in the second and fourth of these verses, and the first verse at least is deficient by a syllable; both these irregularities are practised by our poets.

Bede gives also another example like this in imitation of trochaics.

*Apparebit repentina
Dies magna domini,
In obscura velut nocte,
Improvisos occupans
In tremendo die judicii.*

I have now before me the whole Iliad of Homer epitomized in the same sort of verses: They always
end

end with a word accented on the last syllable but one, and generally the other accents, at least the acute and circumflex, fall on the alternate syllables from these, though there occur in this respect some irregularities. The language seems of a middle age, the words being for the most part ancient, but interspersed with some modern idioms.

The ninth book ends thus, two verses being writ in one line;

πάντες δὲ οὐκ ἡγεμόνες ἔπαινεσσι τὸν λόγον
 τῷ θεῷ δασιόεσι διομήδεσσι· κ' ἔλασε ὁ καθεύδων δειπνῶν,
 καὶ εἰς τὰς σκηνάστας ἦλθον, καὶ ἐκοιμήθησαν ἐνταῦθα.

Crusius in his *Turco-Græcia* has given the *Batrachomyomachia* in modern Greek. The verses are in rhyme, and by supplying the accent upon the alternate syllables of the long words they correspond to tetrameter catalectic iambics, that is, iambics of eight feet wanting a syllable, and have a cæsure, which divides them all at the fourth foot. The poem begins thus;

Πρὸ τῶν ἀρχίσω, δέομαι τὸν ὕψιστον τὸν δία,
 ναμ' ἀποστείλῃ βοηθὸς ἐν τῷ τῷ ἰσοεῖα
 ταῖς μέσταις, ὅπου κατοικοῦν σ' ὄρεσ τῷ ἐλικῶν
 γαλῆ ἐγὼ δὲν δύνομαι, ναλομαξίασιν μόνον
 μάχῃ τῷ πολυτάραχον τῷ ἰχυρῷ τῷ ἄρῃ,
 ὅποῖον θεὸς λογίζεται, καὶ θεῖον παλιχάρον*.

The principal deviation in these verses from the form, here ascribed to them, is in the first foot of either hemistich. In the second hemistich of the
 second

* *Turco-Græc.* l. 6.

second and third lines the first syllable carries an accent, and the second not; the like is done in both hemistichs of the fifth line. It is evident, that the vowels *ae* in the fourth line are contracted into one, and the word *Œdæ* in the last line is used as a monosyllable.

BUT now, as our verse is regulated by the accent, to give our narrative five-foot verse its just and compleat measure the second, fourth, sixth, eighth, and tenth syllable ought to be capable without any violence done the words of receiving some degree of emphasis, and be pronounced in a longer time than the rest; the movement of the verse being always disturbed, when such emphasis is removed from any of these syllables to any other.

THE Italian narrative verse is formed upon the same rule; but their language not abounding in words accented on the last syllable this verse is longer by one syllable than ours. The French narrative verse consists of twelve syllables, and when it ends with their feminine *e*, of thirteen; but that language is so untractable in regard to harmony, that they have not been able to bring their verse under any farther limitation than being divided in the middle into two hemistichs, and the sixth syllable of each certainly accented.

As any error in the measure of the verse is the least offensive toward the beginning of it; our
I poets

poets do often indulge themselves in commencing their verse with a syllable carrying emphasis. But such verse labours in reality under a defect, which is greatest, when the following syllable cannot also be lengthned out. However, other modern languages use the same liberty. We found examples of this in the modern Greek verses above set down; and an Italian grammarian, Lodovico Dolce, directs only the fourth, sixth, eighth, and tenth syllables to be accented in his language*. Trissino goes so far as to allow either a trochaic, or two short syllables in any of the four first places, except in the third only, when either of these feet chances to be in the second†. But our epic verse will scarce bear any such licence beyond the first foot; besides receiving into the place of a long syllable monosyllable particles pronounced short in prose, when the syllables on each side of it are short. The emphasis or accent falling upon the foremost of the two syllables in any foot, except the first, which will make that foot resemble a trochaic; or two syllables placed together in the same foot, which must both of necessity be pronounced short, will certainly destroy the harmony of the verse. Also a syllable in the beginning of the fourth, or even of the second foot, which is best pronounced long, renders the verse less perfect. If the last foot begin with a long syllable, the verse

K 2

will

* Osservat. nella vulgar lingua. l. 4.

† Poetic. division. 2.

will have at least a slow motion, like the spondaic hexameter *.

In this line

Save hē, who reigns above, none can resist
the trochaic foot in the fourth place destroys the measure; whereas the verse may be rendered a just one by this small transposition

Save hē, who reigns above, can none resist
Again, this verse

And tow'rd the gate rolling her bestial train
is broken by the third foot being a trochee, but thus will be corrected

And rolling tow'rd the gate her bestial train
This verse

On him, who had stole Jove's authentic fire
is faulty by the two short syllables, which constitute the second foot. Over the first syllable of the word authentic I have placed no mark of quantity, because I think, if that word stood in a part of the verse, where that syllable might begin one of the feet,

* Do not diphthongs of a full sound, and vowels followed by many consonants agree best with those places of the verse, where the ancient rule of this measure admits the short syllable to be changed into a long one? Perhaps all compositions of mute consonants come under this observation, which cannot easily be united into one sound before a vowel.

feet, which are allowed to consist of two long syllables, the verse would be improved. By the following transposition this verse will receive that advantage, and the principal error also be corrected.

On him, who Jove's authentic fire had stole

IN all verses distinguishably melodious we shall on examination find the just measure always to have been observed. Let these verses of Milton on Thammuz be examined in this respect.

Whose annual wound in Lebanon allur'd

The Syrian damsels to lament his fate

In am'rous ditties all a summer's day :

While smooth Adonis from his native rock

Ran purple to the sea.

These lines, though thus uniform in the numbers, are sufficiently diversified by the different relation of the words to the feet, not to offend by any insipid similarity.

No irregular composition of feet is by any means necessary towards that variety, which is required in the longest work. The change, which will be made in the numbers by the use of long syllables in the places above allowed, the various breaking of the feet by cæsures, dividing the verses after different fashions by the construction of the sentences, continuing often the same sentence, and even the same part of a sentence from one verse to another, are

all, that can properly be made use of for that purpose. This last particular is an advantage, to which Milton observes the shackles of rhyme to be a great impediment: for which reason he disengaged his verse from this incumbrance. Nor is the want of such rhyme any real defect; nay it is indeed an improvement of our verse to free it from a jingle, which has no connection with harmony, pleases so entirely from custom, that, when once out of use, it must doubtless be as offensive in our own, as in the ancient languages *.

THE author of Leonidas appears to have been very attentive to the just measure of his verse; and no less careful to diversify his numbers by the use of all these variations.

He has likewise had regard to another circumstance necessary to support the dignity of the verse, which is to close it with a firm and stable syllable. Milton has now and then neglected this particular, when

* Not without cause some both Italian and Spanish poets of prime note have rejected rhyme both in longer and shorter works, as have also long since our best English tragedies, as a thing of itself to all judicious ears trivial, and of no true musical delight; which consists only in apt numbers, fit quantity of syllables, and the sense variously drawn out from one verse into another; not in the jingling sound of like endings, a fault avoided by the learned ancients both in poetry, and all good oratory. *Milton in the preface to Paradise lost.*

when he ends his verse with a syllable, which in prose is not accented. Sometimes, though not frequently, he adds the supernumerary syllable customary in the tragic writers. In those writers such additions are very properly used; because by farther lengthning the verse it is brought a little down towards prose, to which the measure of verse in that kind of writing ought to approach. But for the same reason in heroics the verse should by no means be weakened with such additional syllables*.

Thus much is sufficient to shew the true ground of that smoothness and flow in the verse, which is generally allowed to the poem, we have taken under examination.

* On the same account it is not so necessary in our epic verse, as in the ancient iambics, to break the movement by a cæsure in the third or fourth foot.

SECTION VII.

Of the difference between epic and dramatic poetry.

ARISTOTLE asserts, that whoever is instructed in the beauties and defects of tragedy, is qualified to judge also of epic poetry; because though tragedy has circumstances distinct from epic poetry; yet there is no part of the epic, of which tragedy does not participate*. However it is certain, there are particulars peculiar to each. And Aristotle himself has considered some differences between them †.

WHAT indeed primarily discriminates epic poetry from the other, is only a difference in degree. The length and variety in the action of an epic poem is suited to shew more parts of each character, even the whole disposition of the mind; as through the course of such a poem the characters must be engaged in transactions of various natures. Whereas in the narrow limits of a tragic action only such passions and sentiments can appear, as that short occurrence gives rise to. The knowledge of human

* "Ὅστις δὲ τραγωδίας οἶδε συνθεαίας καὶ φύλης, οἶδε καὶ ἐπῶν· ἃ μὲν γὰρ ἐποποιία ἔχει, ὑπάρχει τῇ τραγωδίᾳ· ἃ δὲ αὐτῇ, ἢ πᾶν ἢ ἐν τῇ ἐποποιίᾳ. Poët. c. 5.

† Poët. c. 24.

man nature required to an exact discernment, how the same temper will operate under a diversity of circumstances, and what different passions may be united in the same person, and how proportioned, shews the eminent superiority of the epic poetry, and why such productions of any distinguished merit have been so very few through the whole extent of all the known ages. Aristotle is pleased to prefer tragedy; because the action sooner comes to its period, and is more certainly single. This is only saying, it is shorter; and is, I think, no argument to any but an impatient man, who cannot confine his attention to the same thing for any length of time.

As tragedy was derived from epic poetry, and comprehends but a part of it; so it has at present no advantage over its original, but that of assisting the imagination of the spectator by such a representation, as renders the subject an object of his senses. But on the other hand it labours under many restrictions. The whole action is almost necessarily confined to the same individual place: for though greater liberties have been often taken, yet the utmost, that can be allowed with any propriety, is, perhaps, to remove a whole act upon some pressing occasion to a small distance from that spot, where the

* Τῷ ἐν ἐλάτῳ μήκει τὸ τέλος τῆς μίμησεως εἶναι.—
 Ἐπὶ ἧ ἥον μία ὁποιαῦν μίμησις ἢ τῶν ἐποποιῶν.
 Poët. c. ult.

the rest of the action passes. But the epic poet is by no means thus confined : he can carry his reader from place to place without any difficulty, wherever any part of the action may chance to lead. Again, as the sentiments and characters of men appear not only by their words, but by their behaviour also ; the epic poet has the advantage of describing many actions conducive to this end, which cannot be shewn on the stage with any propriety. Thus in all epic poems on military subjects battles under the poet's description make a distinguished figure ; whereas all attempts at engagements, or even single encounters on the stage appear absolutely ridiculous from the awkward manner, in which such actions must necessarily be there performed. Aristotle is understood by his commentators to charge the pursuit of Hector round the walls of Troy by Achilles with ridiculous circumstances* ; but certainly Castelvetro's reflection upon this action is very just, that the only absurdity, which would accompany it on the stage, consists in the imperfection of the representation†. In the
epic

* τὰ μὲν τὴν ἑκτορος δίωξιν ὅτι σκληρῆς ὄντα, γὰρ
λοῖα ἂν φανεῖν, οἱ μὲν ἐστῶτες καὶ ἐδίωκοντες, ὁ δὲ ἀνα-
γνῶν· ἐν δὲ τοῖς ἔπεσι λανθάνει. Poët. c. 24.

† Io credo bene, che questa attione non si dovrebbe, o
potrebbe introdurre in palco, non per la ragione, che dice
Aristotele, perche fosse da ridere il vedere uno essercito non
combattere, quando non combattersse per ubidire ad un suo
maggiore ; ma perche non si potrebbe fare un palco così
grande, che capesse una città come Troia, et una hoste, quale
era

epic poet this action in all the particulars attending it is highly conformable to the characters of each of the combatants. And this is to be observed of all Homer's battles, that after such general descriptions of them as appear evidently designed to fill the reader's mind with striking, and even astonishing images, he in this part of his work equally pursues the design of exhibiting character, employing the greatest part of those descriptions upon the behaviour of particular persons. And this conduct ought to be followed by all poets on the like occasions; for such particular descriptions, when accommodated to illustrate the characters of the agents, will be both entertaining and instructive.

In this means of setting forth characters simply by their actions, the tragic poet has little share. Indeed all that the poet speaks in his own person is peculiar to epic poetry. By this he can various ways adorn his work and convey instruction.

FOR ornament the poet's own language may be enlivened with a greater pomp of expression than ought to be put into the mouth of any character. His conduct herein has already been considered in general. But one particular requires to be more distinctly taken notice of; the frequent use of simi-
lies

era quella de Greci, et appresso haveffe un campo tanto spatiofo, che per effo potesse l'una persona cacciare, et l'altra essere cacciata. Aristot. poetic. part. principal. 4. particell. 3.

lies or comparisons, in which the poets are allowed to abound for strengthening and enlivening their descriptions. Here the ancients assumed a greater liberty, than is now permitted. They had no farther regard to the subject, from which the comparison was drawn, than that it contributed to illustrate, what it was compared with. Homer thought the immense swarms of flies, which in his warm country infest a dairy in the spring, no unapt simile to set forth the numbers of the Grecian army. This simile Vida condemns, as being too mean for the subject; yet his favourite Virgil deserves no censure, when he compares the Trojans in their diligent preparation for their departure from Carthage to as diminutive an insect*. However, it is at present generally expected, that in a great subject the comparisons should also have some degree of dignity. Though this refinement ought not to be extended too far. The lively idea, we receive, of the gigantic strength of Clonius forcing away all before him from his being compared to a countryman treading down the stubble of a field new reaped, I think sufficiently compensates, for what degree of lowness may be supposed in the subject of the comparison.

Gigantic

-
- * *At non exiguis etiam te insistere rebus
Abnuerim, si magna voles componere parvis,
Aut apibus Tyrios, aut Troja ex urbe profectos
Formicis, Lybicum properant dum linquere littus.
Sed non Ausonii recte fœdissima musca
Militis æquaret numerum, cum plurima mulctram
Pervolat.* Poët. l. 2. v. 282.

Gigantic Clonius unresisted press'd
 The yielding Persians, who before him sunk,
 Crush'd like vile stubble underneath the steps
 Of some glad hind, who visits o'er the plain
 His new-shorn harvest.

Leon. B. 4. v. 201.

After a subject is become in familiar discourse a common illustration of what is any way contemptible or disgusting ; that subject cannot well be introduced, where no such image is intended. For this reason, the most immoveable resistance of the strongest hero must not now be compared with any action of such an animal, as an ass, to which we have almost inseparably annex the idea of stupidity. But when no customary forms of speech have laid such impediment in the way, it is not so easy to determine, what subjects are absolutely necessary to be excluded from any kind of writing.

Another restriction has also been prescribed, that the description of the subject brought for comparison should be extended no farther than those very circumstances, wherein it corresponded with the subject, to which it refers. But this rule will render similes flat and insipid, and will frustrate one principal design in the use of them. The reader's attention is often very agreeably relieved in being diverted by some striking or amusing object of a new kind presented to him in these comparisons. But for this purpose the object must be described fully and distinctly. Those similes indeed have a peculiar grace, where the circumstances
 drawn

drawn out to corroborate the description, improve the resemblance. Of this kind is the comparison between mount *Ætna* and the shouts of the Persian army at their first onset.

Such is the roar of *Ætna*, when her mouth
Displodes combustion from her sulph'rous depths,
And blasts the smiles of nature.

Leon. B. 4. v. 59.

This last expression, "blasts the smiles of nature", which marvellously heightens the description, improves also the comparison by suggesting the unrighteous and destructive design of the Persian invasion.

Again, when *Leonidas* surrounded by enemies of various nations is compared to a mountain beaten by tempests, the enumeration of the thunder, the lightning, the snow, and the hail in the description makes the comparison a more complete resemblance of an assault by so many different weapons, and forms of attack.

———Thou unyielding still
Sustain'st the contest, while unnumber'd darts
Are shiver'd on thy buckler, and thy feet
With glitt'ring points bestrew; the Colchian
sword,
And Persian dagger leave their shatter'd hilts;
Bent is the Caspian scymeter; in vain
The Sacian wheels his faulchion, and their mace
The strong Chaldæans, and Assyrians raise:
Thou stand'st unshaken, like a Thracian hill,
Like *Rhodopé*, or *Hæmus*; where in vain

The

The thund'rer plants his livid bolt, in vain
 The glancing lightning cleaves th' incruſted
 ſnow,
 And winter beating with eternal war
 Shakes from his dreary wings diſcordant ſtorms,
 Chill ſleet and clatt'ring hail;

B. 9. v. 522.

We find in Homer a greater profuſion of ſimilies, than in any other poet, the ſame ſubject often illuſtrated by different compariſons ſucceeding one another. The following paſſage is an excellent copy after this original.

As when tempeſtuous Eurus ſtems the weight
 Of weſtern Neptune ſtruggling through the ſtraits,
 Which bound Alcides' labours; here the ſtorm
 With rapid wing reverberates the tide,
 There the contending ſurge with furrow'd tops
 To mountains ſwells, and whelming o'er the beach
 On either coaſt inveſts with hoary foam
 The Mauritanian and Iberian ſtrand:
 Not with leſs rage in hideous onſet meet
 The Grecians and Barbarians. Theſe preſerve
 Their foremoſt ranks unbroken, where was
 drawn

The prime of Aſia's warriors; and the croud
 Though ſtill promiſcuous pouring from behind,
 Yet added preſſure to th' embattled chiefs
 With endleſs numbers. Like the mural ſtrength
 Of ſome proud city bulwark'd round, and arm'd
 With riſing tow'rs to guard her wealthy ſtores;
 Immoveable, impenetrable ſtood

The

The ferried phalanx of the Greeks. Behind;
 Their country spread, their fields with plenty
 crown'd,
 Their native walls and habitations lay,
 With each dear pledge of friendship and of love.
 B. 5. v. 537.

AN epic poem may not only be adorned by an additional pomp of expression, whenever the poet must appear in his own person; but admits also of a prudent insertion of descriptions and reflections, whereby the work may be embellished, though they may not directly contribute to the conduct of the poem.

Of the first kind we may reckon the Persian hymn in the third book of the poem on Leonidas, as likewise the description of the embossment on Leonidas's shield.

The catalogue given in our poem of the Persian army was necessary to convey a full idea of the enormous power of the invader. And to keep up the reader's attention to such a length of description, the poet has embellished it with amusing pictures, of what has been most celebrated in the several countries or people, together with such instructive reflections, as the general subject of the poem naturally suggested: the rivers Euphrates and Araxes are thus described,

— These see the bursting springs
 Of strong Euphrates cleave the yielding earth,
 And wide in lakes expanding hide the plain.
 Thence

Thence with collected waters fierce and deep
 Its passage rending through diminish'd rocks
 To Babylon it foams. Not so the wave
 Of soft Araxes to the Caspian glides:
 But, stealing imperceptibly, it laves
 The fruitful herbage of Armenia's meads.

B. 3. v. 356.

The Persians are thus represented,
 A gen'rous nation. From their infant age
 Their tongues were practis'd in the love of truth,
 Their limbs inur'd to ev'ry manly toil,
 To brace the bow, to rule th' impetuous steed,
 And dart the jav'lin; worthy to enjoy
 The liberty, their injur'd fathers lost,
 Whose arms for Cyrus overturn'd the strength
 Of Babylon and Sardis, and advanc'd
 The victor's head above his country's laws.

B. 3. v. 211.

The Ethiopians,

—In ancient song
 Renown'd for justice, riches they disdain'd,
 As foes to virtue. From their seat remote
 On Nilus' verge above th' Egyptian bound,
 Forc'd by their king's malignity and pride,
 These friends of hospitality and peace,
 Themselves uninjur'd, wag'd reluctant war
 Against a land; whose climate, and whose name
 To them were strange.

B. 3. v. 317.

On the Libyans and Arabians is this pathetic reflection,

L

Not

Not Libya's desarts from tyrannic sway
 Could hide her sons ; much less could freedom
 dwell

Amid the plenty of Arabia's fields.

Ibid. v. 495.

A reflection of the like kind we find upon the Bithynians,

—There they groan'd
 Beneath oppression, and their freedom mourn'd
 On Sangar now, as once on Strymon lost.

Ibid. v. 402.

For the same purpose the catalogue most happily
 closes with the description of the Europeans appearing
 in discontent under their new bondage.

—Yet untaught
 To bend the servile knee erect they stood ;
 Unless that mourning o'er the shameful weight
 Of their new bondage some their brows depress'd,
 And stain'd their arms with sorrow. Europe's race
 Were these, whom Xerxes by resistless force
 Had gather'd to his standards. Murm'ring here
 The sons of Thrace and Macedonia stood,
 Here on his steed the brave Thessalian frown'd,
 There pin'd reluctant multitudes, who bore
 The name of Greeks, and peopled all the coast
 Between Byzantium, and the Malian bay.

Ibid. v. 512.

Though any moral, or other harangue drawn
 out into length is foreign to the nature of these poems,
 where the poet is to instruct by examples,
 not by formal precepts ; yet we find Homer, who

is observed to speak less himself than any other poet, continually making short reflections upon the catastrophes of the personages in his poem. Our author has followed him in this particular; expressing on these, and other occasions also, brief sentiments either moral or pathetic.

On Xerxes entering upon his progress through the Asiatic host.

———— as down

Th' immeasurable ranks his sight was lost,
A momentary gloom o'ercast his mind,
While this reflection fill'd his eyes with tears :
That soon as time an hundred years had told,
Not one of all those thousands should survive.
Whence to obscure thy pride arose that cloud?
Was it, that once humanity could touch
A tyrant's breast? or rather did thy soul
Repine, O Xerxes, at the bitter thought,
That all thy pow'r was mortal? But the veil
Of sadness soon forsook his brightning eyes,
As with adoring homage millions bow'd,
And to his heart relentless pride recall'd.

B. 3. v. 178.

Again at the end of the cavalcade,

Thou, who could'st mourn the common lot,
which heav'n

From none withholds; which oft to thousands
proves

Their only refuge from a tyrant's rage;
And which by pining sickness, age, or pain
Becomes at last a soothing hope to all;

L 2

Thou,

Thou, who couldst weep, that nature's gentle
hand

Should lay her wearied offspring in the tomb ;
Yet could remorseless from their peaceful seats
Lead half the nations in a clime unknown
To fall the victims of thy ruthless pride,
What didst thou merit from the injur'd world ?
What suff' rings to compensate for the tears
Of Asia's mothers, for unpeopled realms
And all this waste of nature ? Ibid. 533.

On occasion of the deaths of Damates and Lycis
we have these descriptions accompanied with a sen-
timent suitable to the occasion.

—— the grove,
Whose hospitable laurels in their shade
Conceal'd the virgin fugitive, that scorn'd
Th' embrace of Phœbus ; hither she repair'd
Far from her parent stream, in fables feign'd
Herself a laurel to have rear'd her head
With verdant bloom in this retreat, the grove
Of Daphne call'd, the seat of rural bliss,
Fann'd by the wing of zephyrs, and with rills
Of bubbling founts irriguous, Syria's boast,
And happy rival of Thessalia's vale ;
Now hid for ever from Damates' eyes.

B. 4. v. 188.

—— Then Lycis bled
For horrid war ill-chosen. He was skill'd
To tune the lulling flute, and melt the heart ;
Or with his pipe's awak'ning strains invite
The lovely dames of Lydia to the dance :

They

They graceful o'er the verdant level moy'd
 In varied measures, while the cooling breeze
 Beneath their swelling garments wanton'd o'er
 Their snowy breasts, and smooth Cayster's wave
 Soft-gliding murmur'd by.

B. 5. v. 412.

On the death of Aristander the poet,
 Him Dithyrambus lov'd, a sacred bard
 Rever'd for justice, for his verse renown'd,
 Which sung the deeds of heroes, those, who fell,
 Or those, who conquer'd in their country's cause,
 Th' inraptur'd soul inflaming with the thirst
 Of glory won by virtue. His high strain
 The muses favour'd from their neighb'ring groves,
 And bless'd with heav'nly melody his lyre.
 No more from Thespia shall his feet ascend
 The shady steep of Helicon. No more
 The streams divine of Aganippe's fount
 His tuneful lip shall moisten, nor his hands
 Present their off'rings in the muses bow'r,
 The prostrate shield and unforfaken lance
 Now feebly grasping, never more to swell
 His lofty numbers on the sounding string.

B. 4. v. 213.

On the death of Teribazus we have this mournful
 reflection,

Him on Choaspes o'er the blooming verge
 His frantic mother shall bewail, and strew
 Her silver tresses in the crystal tide,
 While all the shore re-echoes to the name
 Of Teribazus lost.

B. 5. v. 312.

L 3

As

As our author intended to represent his Grecian heroes superior to their calamity, and had no design to paint them as objects of compassion; so the reflections, he makes on the principal of them, regard chiefly the glory of their memory. For example on the death of Dithyrambus,

—Nor fame, nor Greece demand
More from his valour, and supine he lies
In glories ripen'd on his blooming head.
Him shall the Thespian virgins in their songs
Record once loveliest of the youthful train,
The good, the gentle, generous, and brave,
Now fall'n his country's grace and parents pride.

B. 9. v. 436.

On the death of Agis;

The noble corse Leonidas surveys,
Fate yields him one short interval of peace
To know how lovely are the patriot's wounds,
And see those honours grace the man, he lov'd.

B. 9. v. 642.

Our author has attempted the like encomium on Hyperanthes, the most worthy among the Persians; whereby he sets forth the weakness of the highest praise, which can be merited under arbitrary power.

—Generous prince
What could his valour more? His single might
He match'd with great Leonidas, and fell
Before his native bands.

Ibid. v. 695.

This

This praise, confined only to personal valour, makes a very judicious contrast to the reflections on the catastrophe of Leonidas, wherewith the poem closes.

——Fame can twine
No brighter laurels round his glorious head,
His virtue more to labour fate forbids,
And lays him down in honourable rest
To seal his country's liberty in death.

Ibid. v. 707.

SECTION VIII.

Of the sublime.

THERE remains yet one topic more, upon which to examine the present poem. For as this poem is of the kind, called heroic, it is not sufficient, that the fable or plan bear an exact resemblance to the real actions of men, and that the characters be a true picture of human nature; but the action and the circumstances of it, as also the characters ought to be of so great and exalted a kind, as may constitute and support that sublime, which is required in this kind of poem.

BEFORE we enquire farther into this particular, it is necessary to premise, that the sublime in writing requires no less a right cast of temper in the reader to perceive, than it does warmth and greatness of imagination in the writer to execute.

For by such elevated objects and conceptions all men are not equally moved.

In general that faculty in the mind usually called taste, whereby we are touched with pleasure or disgust by objects presented before us, is not only seen in very different degrees in different men, but is also as various in the diversity of the objects, by which each man is principally affected.

In the course of human life we see some of low passions, who go on in an even attention to their affairs without being greatly moved by love or hatred, hope or fear; while others are strongly affected by the objects around them, some by quick resentment, others by warm emotions of good will, some disturbed by cares, and others excited by ambition. Philosophy undertakes to regulate these, and every other passion, and to direct each to its proper object. But though the enjoyment of life depends chiefly upon possessing a due degree of the good affections, yet no speculation or reflection can excite a lively sensibility in minds naturally cold and languid.

It is the same in taste: insomuch, that many of great understanding in the affairs of life, and even in the speculative sciences, are very moderately affected by the subjects, which are most usually considered as the objects of taste. Again, some are chiefly affected with mirth and humour, others with that unexpected comparison of distant things, which constitutes wit, others again with elegance and decorum; and all these tastes may be unaccompanied

companied with any distinguished degree of that admiration, which impresses on the soul a solemn kind of delight at the view of what is great and uncommon, whether in the works of nature, such as boundless views, tempestuous seas, and stupendous mountains; or in the like actions of men, as great passion, high degrees of prowess and magnanimity, or sentiments raised beyond the ordinary temper of the human mind. But a disposition toward this kind of admiration is that, which disposes to a strong relish for the sublime in writing or actions.

LONGINUS, as necessary to constitute the sublime in writing, requires for the subject suitable conceptions and passions, and in the language, whether prose or verse, a happy choice of words, with an appropriate figurativeness of phrase, and to complete the rest such a harmony and cadence as may improve the dignity of the expression.

A happy choice of distinct and comprehensive words, that may convey the sense with brevity, evidence, and force, is doubtless the principal character, which constitutes the sublime of language. Of this Longinus has given an eminent instance in that passionate ode of Sappho, which he produces.

Why may we not consider in this light the following lines of our author?

Her orphan children, her devoted lord,
Pale, bleeding, breathless on the field of death,
Her ever-during solitude of woe,

All

All rise in mingled horror to her sight ;
When thus in bitterest agonies she spoke.

B. I. v. 286.

Perhaps in the most speculative point, and where the passions are least concerned, such expression as conveys to the mind a conception of the subject with singular distinctness, fulness, and brevity, may be considered, as partaking in some degree of this supreme accomplishment.

That pomp of sound has force to aid the sublime by giving additional energy to the expression, the powerful effects of music abundantly prove ; and figurative forms of speech promote the same design, whenever they render the expression more close, or more comprehensive.

In relation to the subjects most conducive to excite this admiration, wherein we have placed the sublime, besides vehement and enthusiastic passion, not only exalted sentiments, but also such images and actions, as are marvellous, conduce to this end. Hence we find, that writers have at all times made choice of such representations to warm, and fill the imaginations of their readers.

In the days of Homer the superstition of the world peopled the heavens with numerous deities possessed of all the various human passions accompanied with their greatest irregularities. Under these they put the conduct of the world ; and imagined the good or ill fortune of nations, and cities, may even of private men to depend upon their being
the

the favourites, or the aversion of some one or other of these divinities. These therefore Homer intermixes with his armies, and the greatest actions of his heroes are performed by their particular assistance. As to these deities are ascribed more than mortal powers, by this means Homer has filled his poem with vast and surprizing ideas, which could not have had place in it without such assistance. Virgil, though in an age, when the opinions of men were much changed, yet has followed Homer in this particular, as the subject of his poem related to the same times, and is a direct imitation of the other. Lucan, who formed his poem upon an action of his own age, has recourse to prodigies and sorceries, which still continued to be subjects of superstition. Tasso has applied to the same purpose the extravagancies of knight-errantry and enchantments. Milton had a subject, which permitted his fancy to expatiate beyond the bounds of the world, where the strength of his invention has formed greater and more astonishing images than any former poet, or than can be allowed to any succeeding one, whose subject confines him within the limits of human actions and powers.

Indeed nothing supernatural can well be admitted into the plan of any such poem at present. For it is impossible, that men should be seriously affected by such representations, unless they bear some proportion to their real opinions. We find, that even the machinery of Homer gave disgust to succeeding generations, while the same religion remained, as
soon

soon as the world had acquired more worthy opinions of the divine nature. A great part of Plato's artillery, which he plays so warmly against Homer, is directed at this quarter *.

Even Longinus, who professes the most profound reverence for this father of poetry, condemns all these representations as amounting to direct impiety, provided they are not considered as mere allegories †; which had been the apology long before his time, by which these extravagant fables had been excused. For as the ancient deities were, like the human race, represented with different predominant passions, it was easy to consider them as emblems of that temper of mind, whereby each was most distinguished, and so convert the actions originally ascribed to them with no other view than to support their respective characters into an allegorical representation of some internal affection, or motion of the mind.

Upon this model it has come into fashion in later times to frame poems, where the very human personages were intended to express abstract ideas only of particular virtues and vices, or passions and mental faculties; which converted this kind of writing from

* Republ. l. 3.

† Ἀλλὰ ταῦτα φοβερά μὴ, πλὴν, εἰ μὴ καὶ ἄλλοι εἰς λαμβάνοιτο, καὶ πάντα πᾶσιν ἄδεια, καὶ ἔσονται τὰ πρέπον. Ὅμηρος γὰρ μοι δοκεῖ παραδιδούς τραύματα θεῶν, σάπεις, πμωείς, δάκρυα. δετμά, πάδη πάμφορτα, τοὺς μὲν ὅτι Ἰλίου ἀνθρώπους, ὅσον ὅτι τῇ δύναμει, θεὸς πεποιημένοι, τοὺς θεὸς δὲ ἀνθρώπους. Περὶ τ. 2ης §. 8.

from a real representation of human life, in which virtuous and vicious dispositions, good and bad passions, prudence and folly are variously intermixt in the same person, into nothing more than a long extended metaphor, where, in proportion as we attend to the author's meaning, we must lose sight of the picture; and is at last but an obscure and perplext moral lecture upon one or more general topics, which might have been expressed with much greater advantage, because more intelligibly, in plain prose, and without a figure. Nay so much was this humour of allegorizing in esteem, when Tasso writ, that he thought it expedient to prefix to his poem formed directly upon the ancient models such an emblematical interpretation of it.

But in the ancient mythology men of inventive heads could equally discover deep knowledge of natural causes and effects also. The pestilence, which gives the first occasion to the action of the Iliad, is ascribed to Apollo, to denote, that it was caused by intemperate heat from the sun; though in Homer the sun is no where mentioned as any way related to this god. Apollo sits at a distance from the Grecian camp, when he shoots his arrows, that is, in mythological language his rays, because the sun is at a great distance from the earth: the rattling of his arrows alludes to the music of the spheres: Achilles moves for consulting on a remedy, because he was educated by Chiron skill'd in physic; and he acts by the instigation of Juno, who is to represent the air, because the removal of the disease depends upon
dispersing

disperſing the noxious vapours, which the heat of the ſun had raiſed. Juno's being once hung out of heaven with two anvils at her feet repreſents the four elements, Juno denoting the air, which is ſpread under the etherial regions compoſed of the element of fire, and the two anvils expreſſing the other two elements, earth and water, of a more ponderous nature : and that no part of this riddle may be without its myſtery, the chain of gold whereby the goddeſs is ſuſpended, muſt allude to a golden colour imagined to have place between the air and the heavens *. To compleat this extravagance we are told by Tatianus of one Metrodorus of Lampſacus, who explained not only the divine perſons in the Iliad, but the human alſo by the elements, and natural powers ; in ſhort, as Taſſo interpreted his poem into a ſyſtem of morals, this fanciful writer converted the whole Iliad into a body of natural philoſophy †.

By

* Heracl. Pontic. Ἀλληγορίαι Ὀμηρικαί. I cite this writer, becauſe he has expreſſy compoſed his treatiſe upon Homer: But the like allegorizings upon poetic fables are to be found in other authors even of great antiquity.

† Καὶ Μητρόδωρος δὲ ὁ Λαμψακλῶδες ἐν τῷ φεῖ Ὀμήρου λίαν εὐήθως διείλεχται, πάντα εἰς ἀλληγορίαν μεταγῶν· ἔτε γὰρ Ἡραν, ἔτε Ἀθηναίαν, ἔτε Δία τῶν εἶναι φησὶν, ὅπερ οἱ τὸς ἀειδόμενοι αὐτοῖς καὶ τεύχον καὶ διδρύπαντες νομίζουσι· φύσεως δὲ ὑποστάσεις καὶ σοιχείων διακοσμήσεις· καὶ τὸν Ἑκτορα δὲ, καὶ τὸν Ἀχιλλέα δηλαδὴ, καὶ τὸν Ἀγαμέμνονα, καὶ πάντας ἀπαξάπλως Ἕλληνας τε καὶ Βαρβάρους, σὺν τῇ Ἑλένῃ καὶ τῷ Πάριδι τῇ αὐτῆς φύσεως ὑπερχύνας, χάριν οἰκονομίας ἐρεῖ τε παρεισῆχθαι, ἐδενδὸς οὐκ ἔτι περιεργημάτων ἀνθρώπων. Orat. ad Græcos §. 37.

By obtruding upon us such wild imaginations, as revealing the depths of wisdom, has the reason of mankind been insulted * ; whereas the true original of these mythological interpretations of ancient superstitions seems evidently to have been an artifice of the first philosophers to screen themselves from the reproach of irreligion, and the rage of bigots. In Cicero's dialogue on the nature of the gods the Stoic readily subscribes to such allegories, that the treatment, old Cælus received from his son Saturn, was intended to typify the celestial nature's wanting no assistance for the production of all things : and that Saturn denotes the revolution of time ; devours continually the passing years, his children ; and is bound by Jupiter, that is, measured out by the motions of the heavenly bodies †.

But

* Εἰ δ' ἐθέλησαι πρὸς ἐνδοτέρῳ καταβὰς τῶν Οὐρανίων ὀργῶν ἐποηγεῖσθαι τὴν μουσικῇ αὐτοῦ σοφίαν, ἐπὶ γινώσκῃ τὸ δοκοῦν αὐτῷ ἀσέβητα πλάνης μεσὸν ὄναι φιλοσοφίας. Heracl. Pont.

† *Vetus hæc opinio Græciam opplevit, scilicet exsecutum Cælum a filio Saturno, vinctum autem Saturnum ipsum a filio Jove. Physica ratio non inelegans inclusa est in impiis fabulas: cælestem enim altissimam, ætheriamque naturam, id est, igneam, quæ per sese omnia gigneret, vacare voluerunt ea parte corporis, quæ conjunctione alterius egeret ad procreandum. Saturnum autem eum esse voluerunt, qui cursum et conversionem spatiorum ac temporum contineret, — Ex se enim natos comesse fingitur solitus, quia consumit ætas temporum spatia, annisque præteritis insaturabiliter expletur; vinctus autem a Jove, ne immoderatos cursus haberet, atque ut eum siderum vinculis alligaret. l. 2. c. 24.*

But the philosopher condemns this supposed practice of allegorizing in the strongest terms; that investing the gods with human shape, which furnished the poets with their fables, had filled the world with all kinds of superstition *; and charges the writing, as well as the believing such fictions with the utmost folly †.

Plutarch likewise judiciously rejects this method of interpreting these ancient fables, mentioning two in particular, the adventure of Mars and Venus in the Odyssey, and the interview of Jupiter with Juno on mount Ida in the Iliad; upon both which he makes such moral reflections, as might have been drawn from those stories; had they been told of human persons ‡.

Strabo, who scarce gives place to any one in his attachment to Homer, could assign no other use for such fabulous tales intermixt with the instructive parts of poetry than to captivate the minds, and promote the attention of young readers ||; freely confessing, that the thunder, trident, arms of the gods, torches

* *qui induti specie humana fabulas poetis suppeditaverunt, hominum autem vitam superstitione omni referferunt.*
Ibid.

† *Hæc et dicuntur et creduntur stultissime, et plena sunt futilitatis, summæque levitatis.*

‡ De audiend. poet. Oper. tom. 2. pag. 19, 20.

|| *Ἐπεὺθεν ἀρχεται τὰ παιδία ἀκροῦσθαι καὶ κοινωνεῖν λόγων ὅτι πλεον.— Καταρχὰς μὲν οὖν ἀνάγκη τοῖς ἐτοῖς δελίασι χρῆσθαι· περὶ δὲ τῆς ἡλικίας ὅτι τῶν πῶν ὄντων μάθησιν ἀγεῖν, ἥδη τῆς διανοίας ἐρρωμένης, καὶ μὴκέτι δεομένης κολάκων.* Geogr. l. 1. p. 19.

orches of the furies, and the like, were adopted by the first founders of policies only as bugbears to gain a superiority over weak minds *.

In a word, the fabulous ages are now past, and if a poet must not at present pretend to amuse us with stories of gigantic cannibals, or of sorceresses, who can transform men into the shape of beasts; neither must he expect us to indulge him in affected imitations of any other incredible marvels, wherewith ignorant and superstitious generations were seduced.

The only use, which can now be made of the ancient system of theology, is in the way of similitude, which is not inventing new tales of those divinities, but merely alluding to the old. As these subjects make a great figure in the authors, we read during the course of education, and as the impressions, we receive in that early part of life, are very strong and lasting, we cannot but feel pleasure from the recalling such images upon any new occasion. We find Milton himself has made use of such allusions in this way, even while writing on a subject, which constantly presents before our minds the absurdity of those ancient stories. But, as similitudes, such descriptions signify no more than to say, so has been represented

* Κεραυνός γάρ, καὶ αἰγὴς, καὶ τρίαινα, καὶ λαρπαῖ-
δες, καὶ δρεκόντες, καὶ θυρεόλογχα τῶν θεῶν ὅπλα μύ-
θοι, καὶ πᾶσα θεολογία ἀρχαϊκή. ταῦτα δ' ἀπεδείξ-
αυτο οἱ τὰς πολιτείας κατὰς ἡσυχίαν μορμολύχας πνέας
πρὸς τὴν νηπιόφροναν. Ibid.

represented Jupiter, Neptune, or Apollo; though they are not introduced with the flatness of that formality; just as when a modern poet begins with an invocation to the muse, it is only understood as a means of avoiding a direct mention of himself, and answers to the use, which prose authors make of the plural number for the same purpose.

Our author, I think, has made this use of such ancient fables with some success. The modest grace of Dithyrambus on his first accosting the Spartan chief is improved by this simile into the greatest dignity.

——Phœbus thus

Appears before his everlasting fire,
When from his altar in th' embow'ring grove
Of palmy Delos, or the hallow'd bound
Of Tenedos, or Claros, where he hears
His hymns and praises from the sons of men,
He re-ascends the high Olympian seats;
Such reverential awe his brow invests,
Diffusing o'er the glowing flow'r of youth
New dignity and grace.

B. 2. v. 101.

Again the simile of Æolus surrounded by the winds applied to the Grecian army upon their being drawn out to the first attack is very happily chosen to fill the reader's mind with the strongest image of the ardour and impatience for the combat, where-with the general's orders are received.

——Obedient to his will

Th' appointed legions issuing from their tents

With

With deepning ranks Leonidas inclose.
So round their monarch in his stormy cave
The winds assemble, from his sable throne
When Æolus sends forth his dread command
To swell the main, or heav'n with clouds deform,
Or bend the forest from the mountain's brow.

B. 4. v. 7.

In all other respects our author was certainly confined by his subject, both from the nature of the action itself, and from the age, in which it passed, to decline all fabulous interpositions of their divinities in person, or any other such preternatural appearances.

Though ancient tragedians could introduce their deities, and later times, as well as ancient, have brought on the stage the ghosts of men departed; whenever we now attend to such representations with seriousness, it is out of regard to the writer, and the time, wherein he lived; but the revival of any such incredible incidents would be treated with the utmost contempt and disdain. Heroic poems bear so great a resemblance to tragedy, that what is not to be admitted in this, cannot have place in the other without the greatest absurdity. And if it be here asked, by what means then can a modern author attain the heights of epic poetry; I answer by the same, as render Homer still the first of poets; by just representations of life and manners; by sublime descriptions of natural objects; by filling his action with the most striking incidents,

dents, the condition of human affairs will allow;
and above all by sublimity of sentiment.

Let it be considered, what is wanting to complete the sublime of this description.

—— The van

Abrocomes and Hyperanthes led,
With them Pandates, Intaphernes proud,
Hydarnes, Mindus. Violent, their march
With sounding footsteps swept the stony way.
So, where th' unequal globe in mountains swells
A river pours its thundering surge between
The steep-erected cliffs; tumultuous roll
The torrents bursting o'er the pointed crags,
The mountains roar, the marble channel foams.
With obvious arms th' intrepid Greeks withstand
The dire encounter. Soon th' impetuous shock
Of thousands and of myriads shake the ground.
Stupendous scene of terror! Under hills,
Whose nodding summits vaulted o'er their heads,
In unextinguishable fury join'd
The dreadful conflict. With inverted trunks
Obliquely bending from the shagged ridge
The sylvan horrors overshadow the fight.
The shrill-mouth'd trumpet, and the deep-tun'd
horn,
Mixt with the crash of intermingling spears,
The clanging shields, and war's discordant shouts
Awake the echoes through the neighb'ring groves;
And rocks and shores return the hideous sound.

B. 4. v. 560.

This violent conflict at length terminates thus,
——Th'

—Th' unwearied fwords

Of Dithyrambus and Diomedon
 Still blaz'd the terrour of the Barb'rous host,
 Before them fled the Persians to the shore,
 All in a moment by the various bands
 Of Greece surrounded. From the gulph profound
 Perdition here inevitable frowns,
 And there, incircled by a grove of spears,
 They stand devoted hecatombs to Mars.
 Now not a moment's interval delays
 Their gen'ral doom, but down the Malian steep
 Prone are they hurried to th' expanded arms
 Of horror rising from the op'ning deep,
 And grasping all their numbers, as they fall.
 The dire confusion, like a storm, invades
 The chafing billows; loud resounds the shore:
 And o'er whole troops by fell Bellona roll'd
 In one vast ruin from the craggy ridge,
 O'er all their arms and ensigns deep ingulph'd
 With hideous roar the surge for ever clos'd.

B. 5. v. 762.

If we examine the whole course of the battles, in what proportion they rise in confusion and terrour, till they are carried to the utmost pitch of horror, amazement, and destruction in that last assault, which brings on the catastrophe of the poem; I think, we cannot refuse allowing those descriptions a very eminent degree of that sublime, which arises from great and astonishing images. Nor ought we here to forget the solemn sacrifice to the muses, a Spartan custom before battle, and all the rest of

M 3

that

that truly sublime preparation for the final action, wherein the Greeks put a period to their lives, and complete their glory.

But sublimity of sentiment is the supreme excellence of a work of this kind: for without controversy this constitutes the truest, and the highest degree of the sublime. Whatever pleasure we may feel from great and uncommon images, we must acknowledge, that every thing of that kind has the strongest effect upon young and tender minds; whereas sublimity of sentiment will not only warm the heart in youth, but rivet itself more firmly in the soul, as the judgment is matured by time and experience; in short, will ever be considered as the last perfection of the human mind, as long as manliness and public spirit shall have a name in the world.

To judge of our author's success herein we must review his characters, and consider what exalted degrees of magnanimity appear in his principal personages, especially the high spirit which shines forth in his Grecian worthies throughout their whole conduct, and most abundantly in their last fate; but above all that eminent pitch of human virtue, which animates Leonidas, their chief, whose heroism, unmixed with the impetuosity of boisterous rage, arises not from the principles of simple valour and intrepidity only, but from the warmest zeal for the public safety, strong affection for the people, amongst whom he shared the highest honours,

nours, and the justest indignation against tyrannical oppression.

CONCLUSION.

THUS I have attempted according to my ability to inquire into the merit of this poem. For this purpose I have recited the precepts of critics, and have compared the work with the most excellent poems of the like kind both of antiquity, and of our own nation. The reader will doubtless perceive, that this piece has suffered nothing in my opinion by the examination, I have made of it. However I have endeavoured to express my sentiments in the most moderate terms, and as free, as possible, from any charge of partiality. Had I designed a panegyric, I might have delivered myself with more warmth upon many occasions. Perhaps I might have desired the reader to compare this author with Milton in relation to the harmony of the numbers, with Virgil in point of character, and even with Homer himself in regard to sublimity of sentiment.

F I N I S.

